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Combined initial, second and third reports of States parties

Bhutan*

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Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

Report of Bhutan

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Executive Summary

Bhutanese women enjoy freedom and equality in many spheres of life with a relatively high status, in contrast to situations found in many other developing countries. Women comprise 49.5% of the total population of about 698,000 in the Kingdom. Because there is largely equality between women and men in Bhutan, overt discrimination against women does not exist. This is however, a broad overview of the complexity of the status of Bhutanese women. Given that it is difficult to make generalizations on conditions in any country, let alone between different communities and even between villages, there remains scope for further improving social, cultural and economic factors that disadvantage Bhutanese women.

The biggest challenge nationwide is to eradicate the more subdued and indirect forms of gender bias encountered at home and in the workplace. Despite Bhutan's unique approach to development of "Gross National Happiness," which stresses, instead of material rewards, individual development irrespective of gender, many ingrained socio-cultural perceptions nationwide hold women as less capable and confident than men. These aim at validating male superiority while not adequately recognising female capabilities. The social status of women in Bhutan also varies between ethnic communities, and between Buddhist- and Hindu-influenced social practises.

Thus, despite equal opportunities, entitlements and legal status for women and men, differences are seen in equitable access, particularly in education, enterprise development and governance, leading to significantly lower levels of achievement for Bhutanese women and girls. Existing gender gaps appear to be narrowing, although gender-disaggregated data are not yet adequate to provide strong factual information. Much more comprehensive gender-disaggregated data must be compiled and analysed at the national, sub-national and household levels.

Women, children and gender is an important area of the current Ninth Five Year Plan (2002-2007), and the Royal Government recognises that discrimination against women is fundamentally unjust and constitutes and offense against human dignity. Bhutan ratified the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) on 31 August 1981 and, unlike numerous other States Parties to the Convention, has never raised reservations to any part of the document. The National Women's Association of Bhutan has been designated as the public entity to improve women's socio-economic conditions and encourage their participation in development activities.

Although few specific follow-up actions have been taken in line with CEDAW, given that many of the Convention's principles already are integrated into national laws, an existing forum of gender focal persons is being revitalised with greater sharing, learning and capacity building to further enhance mainstreaming of gender issues in the government.

While no parallel projects will be formulated especially for women, the Royal Government is committed to mainstreaming measures related to the promotion of women in development into all sectoral projects and programmes. At the same time, it must be ensured that the commitment to mainstreaming is not misconstrued simply because women
are welcome to participate in all programmes, and attention must be given to formulating clear and measurable results and indicators for gender issues.

Particularly in the major areas of education and health, significant progress has occurred, including major reductions in maternal, under-5 and infant mortality, initiation of widespread gender-

sensitive programmes in nutrition and maternal health, specific prioritsation of reproductive health in national policies, establishment of community schools to promote higher enrolment of girls, and vigorous promotion of non-formal education programmes, where the vast majority of beneficiaries are women. In keeping with its obligations to submit periodic reports on its implementation of the Convention, Bhutan thus offers this document.

All persons are equal before the law in Bhutan, although social customs that differentiate between women and men are still prevalent, primarily in the area of inheritance, where in most parts of the country, women usually inherit the land. With regard to marriage, divorce, child custody and other family matters, local practises reflect freedom and flexibility and guarantee women equal rights and protection. However, certain remaining laws require revisions, including laws on polygamy and polyandry, restricted benefits upon marriage to an expatriate and sexual assault laws in incidents that do not constitute rape. Formally enshrining the concept of equal pay for equal work, at all levels, in the law, with specific penalties for violation, will strengthen it beyond its current inclusion in civil service regulations. Because of the general overall equality of women and men, no legislation explicitly prohibits discrimination against women, including unintentional and/or indirect discrimination, nor is there a national definition of discrimination against women congruent with CEDAW.

In the family sphere, the predominant religious and social values better protect most Bhutanese women compared to those in other countries, and principles of tolerance and respect are emphasised. Overall, parents do not have a preference for sons and give as much care to girls as boys. Women are favoured in terms of inheritance in many parts of the country and they often head the households, taking major household decisions together with husbands and sharing productive work. Instances of female infanticide, dowry deaths, bride burning, vicious acid attacks and organised trafficking in women are absent.

Lack of women's education represents a particular constraint to full gender equality, and areas for substantive attention in the Ninth Plan will include increasing enrolment of girls at higher levels of education as well as dramatically improving female literacy. Although gender disaggregated official statistical data is not available, it is estimated that total female literacy rate is only half that of men – overall literacy in the country is 54%.

In health, meanwhile, Bhutan is beginning to view women's health in a more holistic way, as part of the overall life cycle and expanding beyond the realm of reproductive health. Even so, continued attention continues to be given to reproductive health to consolidate gains in recent years that have allowed the population growth rate to decline from 3.1% per annum to 2.5% per annum. With a rising number of sex workers inside Bhutan, primarily in border towns, the Royal Government also is increasingly facing a dilemma on how to deal with the sex trade and, in particular, its health implications in terms of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted infections.

Women's participation in the labour force, particularly in the modern sector of the economy, remains modest; the majority are still involved in agriculture. Lower levels of education and skill enhancement result in women being "less employable," particularly in urban centres. Although some urban women are now prominent as the heads of successful businesses, most women remain concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid jobs with often-limited promotion prospects. With the emergence of rapidly increasing rural-urban migration, many girls and women find themselves employed as domestic help, particularly in child-care. However, to counter this trend, the Ninth Five

Year Plan will encourage establishment of child care centres and nurseries to ease burdens on working urban families.

Initiatives taken by Their Majesties the Queens and other female members of the Royal Family to serve the Royal Government, particularly in leading social service activities, are providing positive female role models and lend encouragement for girls and women to participate in public service. At the same time, there remains scope for improvement in Bhutanese women's participation as an active force in the political life of the country.

Despite positive indicators, a 2001 baseline gender study found that many women feel that men are better equipped to understand and participate in matters of governance. Many women also remain reticent to speak in public, particularly if they are illiterate. Women are thus very much underrepresented in block and district development committees, as well as in national Government. Women do participate, however, in the election of village heads and representatives to the National Assembly and attend public village meetings. Study findings indicate extensive travel and/or the demands of household and farm work, tend to prevent women from attending higher-level meetings. Encouragingly, however, 14 of 99 elected people's representatives to the National Assembly are women, and one of six Royal Advisory Councillors also is female. A 1998 Royal Decree underscored the importance of women's representation in public life.

Women's rights to credit are largely unimpeded but may vary between ethnic groups. And although a review of credit patterns still indicates the leading role of men in taking most investment decisions. Extension of microcredit to rural women for income generation has been a priority.

A new and important area of concern where action is being taken is that of violence against women and sexual abuse/sexual harassment. Steps are beginning to get under way to sensitise police, judges, doctors, teachers, mass media and political leaders alike to domestic and sexual violence through education and awareness training, in order to make intervention more effective. A new and strong focus on domestic violence as a pervasive human rights issue will be initiated. Likewise, a new and strong focus will be given to the eradication of sexual abuse and sexual harassment of women and girls, particularly in the workplace, at school and in rural social life.

In general, awareness building of gender equality is being enhanced at all levels so that women and men both are better aware of women's rights in numerous spheres. The Royal Government is making all efforts to institute necessary changes to eradicate remaining gender gaps and shortcomings that exist, particularly in education/literacy, employment and public decision-making. In spite of various constraints in its implementation of CEDAW – not least of which is the significant lack of human resources the Royal Government is sincere in its determination to not be part of the pervasive, structural and systemic denial of rights that affects women and girls worldwide, with details included in the attached full report. Thus, Bhutan will build on its established bedrock of commitment to gender equality and will ensure that this is raised in the future to the next level and beyond.

1. Country Background

Within the context of development, the Kingdom of Bhutan represents an exception: Despite mounting social and economic pressures, its people generally enjoy a standard of living rarely found in South Asia.

Between 1984 and 2000, for example, the average life expectancy soared from 48.0 to 66.1 years, infant mortality was reduced from 142 per 1,000 live births to 60, and health coverage rose from 65% to 90% of the population. Literacy increased from 23% in 1980 to the current 54%, although improvements still are needed. Women comprise 49.5%[1] of the projected 2001 population of 698,950 [see Table 1.1, Annex B.] A highly progressive and people centered development philosophy of Gross National Happiness is the cornerstone of all Royal Government policies and programmes.

Extreme poverty, widespread environmental destruction and uncontrolled urbanisation, are little known in Bhutan, although the latter is sharply on the increase. In 1961, the nation's per-capita Gross Domestic Product was estimated at only US$51, then the lowest in the world. Today, however, it stands at US$712.8, one of the highest in South Asia. Bhutan should be considered one of the few countries where the quality of life of its people is higher than would be expected from traditional development indicators.

Geographically, the Kingdom has land area of 38,394 square kilometers encompassing some of the most rugged terrain on Earth. The land rises steeply from about 100 metres above sea level in the south, along a narrow strip on the border with India, to 7550 metres in the north, among icy Himalayan peaks.

Although nearly 80% of the population is still engaged in agriculture and other traditional rural practices, about 16% of the land is arable out of which 8% is actually cultivated because of its steepness, which presents formidable challenges. The nation's capital and largest city, Thimphu, has a population of about 50,000, which is estimated to be growing at an accelerating rate of 10% per annum because of rural-urban migration.

1.1 History

Throughout its known history since the 7th Century A.D., when Buddhism arrived in the country, Bhutan has been an independent, uncolonised nation. It was not until the 17th Century C.E., however, that the country was unified, under Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal (1594-1652). After the Zhabdrung's death, the country reverted for two centuries to a panoply of competing fiefdoms, a highly unstable situation resolved only in 1907 when Ugyen Wangchuck (1862-1926), a respected district governor, was selected as the first Druk Gyalpo, or King of Bhutan. His great-grandson, Jigme Singye Wangchuck, ascended the throne as the fourth King in 1974, when he was only 17 years old, and provides the nation's leadership and vision today.

Buddhism was introduced in the 7th Century and has a significant influence on the values of the Bhutanese people, shaping the institutions, arts, drama, architecture, literature and social structure. Although the majority of Bhutanese are Buddhists, Hinduism, practiced primarily in southern Bhutan, also is significant and has many common divinities with Buddhism. The official language is Dzongkha, with Tsangla, Nepali and English also spoken by large numbers of Bhutanese.

[1] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat, Central Statistical Organisation, 2001 [hereafter Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001].

1.2 Structure of Government

The three main branches of Government are the executive, legislative and judiciary. In 1998 His Majesty the King introduced far-reaching changes in the governance of Bhutan, widening the process of democratisation and people's participation. All Cabinet Ministers, previously appointed by His Majesty, are now elected by the National Assembly and the Assembly has a mechanism to register a vote of confidence in the Monarch. In accordance with these decisions, His Majesty no longer presides over the Council of Ministers, and the Chairman of the Council, a position that rotates annually, is now the Head of Government and *de facto* Prime Minister.

In September 2001, in yet another historic move, His Majesty commanded the drafting of a written constitution for the country as the pillar of Bhutan's governance, and this document is expected to be adopted during the current Ninth Five Year Plan (2002-2007). Meanwhile, the sectoral Ministries are vital to the implementation of the nation's policies. The *Tshogdu*, or National Assembly, is the legislative organ of Government and was established in 1953. All laws are enacted by this body of 150, of whom 99 members are *chimis*, or representatives of the people, elected for a three-year term. Other bodies that also are important in the development of the country include the Royal Advisory Council; the Planning Commission; the Royal Civil Service Commission; and the Central Monk Body, which has a vital social and cultural role.

Bhutan is divided into 20 *dzongkhags*, or districts, some of which are subdivided into subdistricts; the smallest such political units are the 201 *gewogs*, or blocks. At the district, block and village levels, high priority has been accorded to the establishment of decentralised systems of decision-making that have served to empower local communities and give them a voice in the nation's development. The creation in 1981 of *Dzongkhag Yargye Tshogchung* (DYTs, or District Development Committees) and, a decade later, of *Gewog Yargye Tshogchung* (GYTs, or Block Development Committees) has provided forums for local decision-making that allow direct links between concerns expressed by local elected representatives and the national processes of policy formulation and development planning.

The Ninth Plan is centred on *gewog*-based planning and people's participation. With the revision of their Chathrims (Rules and Regulations), both DYTs and GYTs being given considerable additional and both DYTs and GYTs are being given additional authority for the formulation, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of development activities. Strengthening of local institutions and devolution of power from the centre have led to the active participation of ordinary Bhutanese in governance, including women, whose numbers are still low overall but rising. Revised DYT and GYT Chathrims devolving greater administrative and financial powers to the dzongkhags and gewogs have been endorsed during the 80th Session of the National Assembly.

1.3 The Judiciary and Other Key Bodies

The basic principle of modern jurisprudence – that only an effective and independent judiciary can protect and enforce the fundamental rights of citizens – has been recognised in Bhutan. Moreover, a foundation of Bhutanese law is that all persons, irrespective of gender, are equal before the law.

The country's legal system has an ancient history, based on codes promulgated by Zhabdrung Ngawang Namgyal, the 17th-Century spiritual ruler. The present laws, as they exist in the *Thrimzhung Chhenpo*, or Supreme Laws, were first codified and enacted by the National Assembly in 1957 during

the reign of the third King. Almost all categories of criminal offenses and their penalties are incorporated there.

The Royal Government fully subscribes to the principles enumerated in various human rights instruments, such as CEDAW, Convention on the Rights of Children, Millennium Development Goals etc. including the basic rights to food, clothing, shelter, education and health care.

1.4 Approach to Development

Bhutan's approach to development has been shaped by Mahayana Buddhism, which stresses, instead of material rewards, individual development irrespective of gender; sanctity of life; compassion for others; respect for nature; social harmony, and the importance of compromise. To maximise the happiness of all Bhutanese and to enable them to achieve their full potential as individuals without undermining the traditional social and cultural values is the central tenet of the concept of Gross National Happiness, the country's overarching philosophy of development. This is to be accomplished within the framework of traditional values and ethics, and through concerted efforts to achieve sustainable improvements in the standard of living, the quality of life, and the levels of well-being and welfare.

Overall, Bhutan has taken a late approach to modern development, in large part because of its long-isolated history, and it cautiously opened up only in 1961 with the adoption of its First Five Year Plan. Then, the nation possessed very little of the infrastructure associated with a modern nation-state. The vast majority of Bhutanese were almost totally dependent upon the land for survival; there were no roads, no motor vehicles, no electricity, no telephones, no postal services.

But since then, a swift transformation has occurred. For the decade between 1988 and 1998, for example, the economy grew at an annual rate of nearly 7%, a figure matched by few Least Developed Countries. The key to much of this growth has been the prudent harnessing of the country's natural renewable resource potential, especially for the generation of hydropower. Opportunities have expanded and cash incomes increased. The development of transport and communication infrastructure also has integrated many parts of the Kingdom. The Ninth Plan places a very high priority on the further development of rural road infrastructure.

In promoting decentralised governance and people's participation, the Royal Government was cognisant of the need to enhance the understanding of different needs, interests and constraints on women and men; involvement of women and men in the development process, and the impact of various programmes on their lives. With the Ninth Plan process already in motion, it undertook, supported by the United Nations System in Bhutan and the UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office in New Delhi, the nation's first pilot gender study as an input to the Five Year Plan.[2]

Bhutan has given its topmost priority to investment in people. Every effort has been made to channel economic growth toward ensuring universal access to basic health, education and essential social services. Individual plan outlays since the initiation of planned development in 1961 have accorded importance to the social service sector. The plan allocation to the health and education sector during the Seventh and Eighth Plan has been more than 20% of the total plan outlay, while the Ninth

[2] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat and Central Statistical Organisation; UNDP, UNICEF and WFP Bhutan Country Offices; and UNIFEM South Asia Regional Office, 2001 [hereafter Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001].

Plan (2002-2007) allocates about 24% of its total plan outlay of Nu. 70 billion to the sector. At the same time, balanced and equitable development requires special measures in support of disadvantaged and vulnerable groups, as well as efforts to ensure that those who have been largely bypassed by the benefits of development are drawn more fully into the mainstream. Although the majority of Bhutanese have benefited in very tangible ways from the development process, there still remain areas that require further concerted efforts. This is, perhaps, an inevitable consequence of modernisation in a country in which the population is so scattered, the terrain so rugged, the infrastructure still incomplete and the acute shortage of trained and available human resources in specialized fields still constitute a problem particularly due to mismatch in supply and demand.

1.5 Demographic and Social Background

Demographically, Bhutan has been characterised by a high fertility rate and a declining mortality rate, leading to very rapid population growth. Its population comprises a large number of young people; 42.1% of Bhutanese are below the age of 15 [see Table 1.2, Annex B].

The nation is committed to accomplishing Health for All and Education for All and has set specific targets relating to primary school enrolment, adult literacy and reductions in infant, child and maternal mortality through access to health services, better dietary intake and promotion of better child care practices.

Barely 40 years ago, instruction was mostly religious and few Bhutanese were literate; almost all undergoing any form of education were men. Bhutan possessed only 11 primary schools, which catered to the needs of fewer than 500 children; it was not until 1968 that the first 20 Bhutanese completed high school within the country. Now, Bhutan has more than 117,700 students. In 2000, statistics indicated the boy-girl ratio in primary education was 55 to 45.[3] Education is free from the primary to the tertiary level. Enrolment at the secondary level now exceeds the absorptive capacity of the existing educational infrastructure.

Despite many encouraging signs, the high dropout and repeater rates provide genuine cause for concern. Only 69.3% of all who enter primary school actually complete primary education, although this is improved from 60.5% as recently as 1996. In addition, of 108,398 primary students, 13,814 were repeaters and 4,841 were dropouts. About 54% complete Class VIII and 39% reach Class X.[4]

Turning to the area of health, it has been estimated that a Bhutanese born in 1960 could expect to live to an average age of only 35. Before the initiation of the First Five Year Plan in 1961, Bhutan's health infrastructure consisted of four small hospitals and a handful of dispensaries. Communicable diseases were widespread, and more than half of all children died at birth or during infancy. Water supplies were largely confined to springs and streams.

Creating a basic health infrastructure was an urgent priority, and people's access to basic social services now has improved significantly. In 2000, Bhutan had 29 hospitals, 160 Basic Health Units and 18 indigenous treatment centers providing free access to more than 90% of the country's population.[5] Today, the

[3] Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001.
[4] Royal Government of Bhutan, PCS, 2002.
[5] Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001.

country has achieved a child immunisation coverage rate of 90%, and iodine deficiency has been virtually eliminated. Much also has been done to provide clean water to communities across the Kingdom.

Allocations to social sectors like health, education, and water and sanitation have always been a priority, as much as 26% during the Second Plan (1966-1970), when many of the modern sectors were established [see Table 1.3, Annex B]. In the Ninth Plan, the Royal Government has continued its firm commitment, devoting more than 24% of its outlays to these sectors

Because Bhutan's population density is currently low and large tracts of land remain unoccupied, this could lead to the assumption that the Kingdom, unlike many of its neighbours, is free of population pressures. Such a view would be widely misplaced. One of the greatest challenges that has confronted Bhutan is the nation's rapid rate of population growth. Even with recent significant improvement from the previous growth rate of 3.1% per annum, the country's population will double in about 25 years. This is a disturbing prospect that carries many negative consequences for the environment, food security, nutrition, employment creation for both women and men, and the balance of payments. The thrust of the country's policies for addressing this serious threat is reproductive health care, including family planning.

1.6 Economic Background

The Bhutanese economy grew by 6.7 percent during the Eighth Plan period (1997-2002). In 1990 the economy was still dominated by agriculture, which contributed 44.1% of Gross Domestic Product. Today, the agriculture sector's share has declined to 34.5 percent but while the contribution of modern sectors such as construction, manufacturing, electricity, transport and communications has increased significantly, employment in these sectors remains limited. A complete look at the changes in sector-wide shares of GDP during the decade from 1990 to 2000 reveals the following:

Share to GDP in 1980 prices (%)[6]

Sector	1990	2000
Agriculture	44.1	34.5
Mining and Quarrying	0.9	1.2
Manufacturing	7.0	7.1
Electricity/gas	9.1	9.7
Construction	6.1	11.4
Trade and Other Activities	6.0	6.0
Transport and Communications	7.6	9.8
Financial Services	9.4	10.3
Community and Social Services	9.9	10.1
Total	**100.0**	**100.0**

Unlike most developing countries, Bhutan suffers from a general shortage of human resources in specialised fields – due in large part to mismatches of demand and supply – which has acted as a major constraint in the development of the economy. Therefore, human resource planning has focused mainly

[6] National Accounts, CSO, Planning Commission, 2001

on developing the skills of a small labour force. To make optimal use of its available human power measures such as increased mechanisation and automation have been pursued wherever appropriate.

For the Ninth Plan, the following overall objectives and strategies have been adopted, most of which have already been examined above:

- Improving quality of life and income, especially for the poor;
- Ensuring good governance;
- Promoting private sector growth and employment generation;
- Preserving and promoting cultural heritage and environmental conservation;
- Achieving rapid economic growth and transformation

Important areas of the Ninth Plan include women, children and gender; legislative reform; decentralisation and devolution; determinants of poverty; and employment. Combined with Bhutan's traditional Buddhist beliefs, values and customs, these comprise the essential components of the distinctively Bhutanese approach to development in the early 21st Century.

2. Introduction to the Situation of Women in Bhutan

Because there is largely equality between women and men in Bhutan, no overt discrimination against women exists in the Kingdom. While true to a much larger extent than in other developing nations, this is, however, a broad overview of the complexity of the status of Bhutanese women. This section will examine the most general issues that women in Bhutan face on a number of social, political and economic fronts, with more detailed examination reserved for sharply focused sections below.

Women in Bhutan enjoy a high status compared to other developing countries, especially within the region, with relative freedom and equality in many spheres of life. Similarly, the Royal Government recognises that discrimination against women is fundamentally unjust and constitutes an offense against human dignity. In 1990, for example, His Majesty the King himself expressed the country's commitment to eliminate any gender inequalities arising because of the development process. The law in Bhutan treats women and men equally; women's rights and interests are safeguarded by many provisions of different legal Acts.

The predominant religious and social values also better protect most Bhutanese women compared to those in other countries, and principles of tolerance and respect are emphasised. Overall, parents do not have a preference for sons and give as much care to girls as boys. Women are favoured in terms of inheritance in many parts of the country. Instances of female infanticide, as well as the dowry deaths, bride burning, vicious acid attacks and organised trafficking in women found in other nations in the region, are absent.

In further contrast to practises elsewhere, a husband's consent is not required to perform medical procedures or to prescribe contraceptives. Nor is there an underlying sexual tension or threat in public encounters between genders. Women often head the households and oversee domestic business transactions, and men's and women's traditional work roles frequently overlap, in productive as well as household tasks; indeed, in rural areas there is seemingly more sharing of household work than in urban areas.[7] Most household decisions are taken together by wives and husbands, and in most Bhutanese communities, explicit roles of

[7] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.

dominance and submission are unacceptable. No shame is attached to the dissolution of marital relationships, and a one-parent mother seldom fears social stigma.

Even so, there remains scope for improving social, cultural and economic factors that disadvantage Bhutanese women. This is particularly so among the significant minority who follow the different traditions in Hindu society and family life, including the influence of the caste system, which often result in women's relatively lower status.

The biggest challenge nationwide is to eradicate the more subdued and indirect forms of gender bias encountered at home and in the workplace. No national definition of discrimination against women exists congruent with CEDAW Article 1. Some ingrained socio-cultural perceptions generally hold women as less capable and confident than men. These perceptions validate male superiority while not adequately recognising female capabilities. Thus, despite equal opportunities and entitlements for women and men, differences are seen in equitable access, including education, enterprise development and governance; this has led to significantly lower levels of achievement for Bhutanese women and girls,[8] although existing gender gaps are increasingly narrowing.

2.1 Traditional Perceptions

Bhutanese society has long recognised the challenge of being a woman. The status of women in Bhutan is, in fact, influenced by many factors, including the continuing acceptance by society that men and women have specific roles to play in the structure of the family. In spite of women's participation in all spheres of life, they continue to be regarded primarily as the homemaker, wife and mother. It is, however, very difficult to make sweeping generalisations about women's status because of vast differences found in the society, between ethnic communities and sometimes even between villages in the same district.

Because women tend to be perceived as biologically less strong and sexually more vulnerable, these have greatly influenced their position in terms of access, including educational and employment opportunities. Women's own perception of themselves in Bhutan seems to be based on these two factors, which are viewed as shortcomings. One study with limited representation and coverage have found that the belief that men are higher than women by nine "noble" – i.e., human – births remains strong in some rural areas, although educated women increasingly refute it. Almost all rural women in one of the studies said they prefer to be born male.[9] However, these traditional beliefs have not prohibited women from involvement in agriculture, household decision-making, property inheritance, or participation in local events and other community activities. Practices of these beliefs therefore vary considerably and are less influential in urban areas.

Women's movement outside the home is limited by their primary responsibilities as homemaker, wife and mother, and some men, particularly in southern Bhutan, are reluctant to allow their wives freedom of movement. Thus, some women have restricted mobility and opportunities. In rural areas, movement beyond the community may be implicitly discouraged if there are no male companions, because of perceived vulnerability of women. Nevertheless, more and more women are beginning to travel on their own; this trend is especially visible with women who are entrepreneurs, business executives, civil servants and students.

[8] Ibid.

[9] Ibid.; Kinga, 1999.

2.2 Roles of Rural Women and Men

To extract a living out of farming, the efforts of all members of a household must be combined for maximum effort[10]. This is particularly the case in a nation like Bhutan, where an acute lack of human resources exists; rural households traditionally exchange labour to overcome varying requirements.

Against such a backdrop, it is hardly surprising that no distinct division of roles is apparent between the majority of rural women and men, although data suggest a general division of labour based on traditional beliefs about "physical strength."[11] However, while plowing with oxen is generally regarded as a man's job and housekeeping as a woman's function, this is not a rigid arrangement and may be altered depending on the practicalities of each day and each situation. A household short of women, for example, may have a man taking care of the routine domestic work such as childcare, cooking, washing clothes and cleaning, although some men perform such chores only if the women cannot attend to them. Cultivation and all of its processes – ranging from sowing to harvesting – are fully shared. Rural women are not only engaged in main economic activities but also are the primary workers for supplementary activities such as kitchen gardening and handicrafts.[12]

The head of a household is not a gender-specific domain, and it is usually the more capable person – often the wife or the eldest daughter – who assumes this responsibility. If the man is away in the field, the woman at home, in addition to her regular chores, performs many managerial functions, including household decisions and day-to-day responses on unforeseen community matters. With women generally serving as the custodian and controller of the family purse, the emergence of the marketplace as an income-generating mechanism for rural people has boosted their purchasing power.

Thus, male and female domains remain blurred to a large extent, at least in northern and eastern Bhutan. More data are required for a comprehensive understanding of factors that affect the gender division of labour among the communities of southern Bhutan.

The introduction of farm machinery and improved agricultural tools, such as those for weeding, are intended to ease the farming activities of both women and men in all communities. The Royal Government, aware of the extreme human resources shortage in the rural areas, attaches a great deal of importance to automation and mechanised farming besides encouraging the production of labour-saving tools that are highly subsidised and made affordable to the rural population. Even so, men have been found responsible for the decisions relating to purchase of equipment and farm machinery in more than 60% of households. Further investigation of this trend is needed to ensure that women understand and use technology; technology does not marginalise or bypass women; and women can help to evolve appropriate technologies that will ease their workload.[13] Such technologies not only add value to women's economic activities but also can enhance their marketable skills through validation of their traditional knowledge in food production, healing practices and management of natural resources.

Particularly useful is less costly intermediate technology that emphasises local resources and can have a direct impact on women's time poverty, such as low-cost storage practices for grain to

[10] Royal Government of Bhutan, 1995.
[11] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.

prevent pests, hand-operated grinding machines and solar cookers. Identifying and prioritising areas for adaptation of technology that leads to saving time and reducing drudgery will be emphasised. Ensuring that women have access to knowledge and information – broadcast, electronic, print and popular – also is essential to bringing them into the mainstream of the technological world.

2.3 Urban Women

Turning to urban women, we find two distinct sub-divisions: that of housewives and non-working women, who tend to be less educated, and that of highly educated women. Overall, these two groups have divergent needs and interests from rural women.

The critical needs of most rural women, for example, can be summarised as ownership of assets and access to health care and educational services, potable water, fuel, credit, labour-saving devices and markets. On the other hand, most urban women need access to marketable skills and employment. In urban areas, men appear to be the primary earners while most women are supplementary earners, resulting in the lesser sharing of household duties and suggesting that as households move away from subsistence-based activities, women may not be perceived as equal partners in the new economic opportunities and may be losing their decision-making roles.[14]

In contrast to non-working urban women/housewives, highly educated working women appear to believe that a traditional notion of female vulnerability has developed mainly as a result of women's biological role as child-bearers. The accelerating shift of values from the physical to the intellectual, they assert, has made any concept of masculine superiority invalid.[15] These women also are beginning to feel the pressure of having to manage a career and a family or household.

Although in some limited studies highly educated women have reported feeling conscious of and resentment about subtle social discrimination, few seem to support the idea of special remedies to promote the advancement of women.[16] So long as national policies are gender-neutral, which they are, many educated women say merit alone should be the criterion for any advancements.

2.4 Crucial Gaps in Data

The Royal Government bears in mind the CEDAW committee's view that women's actual position in their societies is best measured quantitatively as well as qualitatively and its encouragement of the submission of statistical information. However, it must be noted that gender-disaggregated data are not yet adequate to provide strong factual information on the situation of Bhutanese women in all areas covered by the Convention.

Among the factors affecting data deficiencies are shortage of trained human resources in data collection, analysis, survey sampling and operations research. Databases are still required, for example, to determine the size, composition and distribution of the population by rural/urban, regional and district levels; monitor implementation of goals and plans of actions of various United Nations conferences, including the Fourth World Conference on Women; and determine other socio-economic

[14] Ibid.
[15] Kinga, 1999.
[16] Ibid.

indicators that could be disaggregated by gender and additional factors. Gaps in policy research also have been identified, including, for example, factors affecting school enrolment and dropout rates.

Recognising the need to strengthen national capacities, the Royal Government has specifically supported enhancing the capability of the Central Statistical Organisation of the Planning Commission Secretariat in the collection and analysis of socio-demographic and, especially, health-related data. Within that context, collection of gender-disaggregated data is becoming prioritized, especially with the establishment of information and research units in the line ministries.

2.5 Conclusion

In summary, women in Bhutan generally enjoy a high status compared to women in most developing countries, particularly in the region, even as they still face considerable challenges. They have relatively greater or lesser status depending primarily on which ethnic community they belong to, when broad indices of parameters to measure that status are considered.[17] Such indices include:

- Women's access to and control over private resources, such as land, houses, livestock, jewelry and so forth, as well as savings, family income, food and inheritance;
- Women's access to public resources, including access to health facilities, formal education level, food security, nutritional levels, access to credit, and division of labour in fuel and water collection;
- Women's control over their labour and income, such as their level of autonomy in deciding waged and non-waged work, whether they themselves manage their wages, and control over household expenditures;
- Women's control over their bodies, including decision-making powers in marriage, child-bearing and birth control, sexual relations with their partners, and experiences of physical violence and mental abuse, including rape, wife-beating and workplace harassment;
- Women's control over their physical mobility, including places they can visit alone, can go at night, cannot go and so forth;
- Women's access to and control over political spaces, such as participation in community affairs;
- Women's access to and control over intangible resources, such as access to information;
- Women's position in law and access to legal structures and redress, including legal provisions for gender equality, awareness of the law and their rights, and experiences with police and courts.

In Bhutan, social transformation in the context of gender is premised on the goal of substantive equality rather than formal equality, an effort that the Royal Government has stated repeatedly that it supports. While formal equality is based on the notion of the "sameness" of men and women, substantive equality requires taking legislative account of the ways in which women are different from men, both in terms of biological capacities as well as the socially constructed disadvantages women face relative to men.

Barriers to equality of opportunity in Bhutan, such as they are, are overwhelmingly social and economic; published statistics on education, health and other factors all still remain lower for women and girls than for men and boys. Having said that, policy changes such as those undertaken in recent years are designed

[17] United Nations Development Fund for Women, 1998.

to lead to legal, political, economic, social and familial empowerment of women; self-empowerment of women leads to assertion of rights, articulation skills, critical thinking, awareness and self-image. It is this challenge – to build upon its achievements in continuing to assure equal access to resources, education, economic opportunity, power to participate and sharing of decision-making at all levels for women – upon which Bhutan will continue to focus in the future.

3. Bhutan and CEDAW

Bhutan signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women on 17 July 1980, ratifying it on 31 August 1981. Unlike numerous other States Parties to the Convention, Bhutan has never raised reservations to any part of the document and fully accepts the Convention as an international bill of human rights for women. It wholeheartedly agrees with the obligation of the state under CEDAW to take concrete steps to eliminate discrimination against women, even by a private person, organisation or enterprise. While the Royal Government is very pleased that the overall status of women in Bhutan is comparatively high, it commits itself to rooting out any remaining social, cultural or economic impediments to the full equality of women and closing any gaps.

Subsequent to Bhutan's ratification of CEDAW, a committee was formed to monitor the country's commitments under the Convention. The committee also was responsible for commissioning studies on the situation of women in Bhutan; three studies were completed, with international assistance, on health, water and sanitation, and education. Although few specific follow-up actions have been taken with regard to CEDAW, an existing forum of gender focal points in various Ministries has now been revitalised under the leadership of the Planning Commission Secretariat and will focus on greater sharing, learning and capacity building.

In keeping with its obligations to submit periodic reports on its implementation of the Convention, Bhutan thus offers this document.

3.1 Commitment to Women

In many parts of the world, women are not permitted to own or inherit property, lack the right to make personal decisions, earn lower wages than men, are victims of physical or sexual abuse and are exploited by their husband's family. These subvert women's self-esteem and weaken their physical and economic health.

In Bhutan, as has been described, many of these problems are minimised if not eliminated in a *de jure* as well as a *de facto* sense, although various social, cultural and economic factors remain that impede the full equality of women. The Royal Government is attempting to address these discriminatory factors through its manifold policies and leadership which has led to concrete changes. Nevertheless, the Royal Government recognizes that gender equality issues constitute a pressing concern with the increasing pace of modern development.

In all Bhutan's Five Year Plans, human resource development has been and continues to be accorded one of the highest priorities. With a total estimated population of only 698,000, it is natural that every member of society has a special role to play. Because women constitute basically half the population, the Royal Government intends to develop this resource to its full potential and mobilise it effectively for the cause of community and national benefit. The guiding principles for all Five Year Plans, including sustainability and self-reliance, have created a favourable environment for building on achievements to continue to improve the

situation of women. Bhutan's overall prolonged political stability under the hereditary Monarchy is another important factor for progress in the situation of women.

The Royal Government also aims to provide all the facilities and conditions necessary to achieve global goals for the benefit of women, including the eight poverty-related Millennium Development Goals. It is conscious of the need to be aware of the changing and balanced roles of women and men as development gains momentum. In essence, all Government institutions are responsible for the implementation of women-related activities. And although there are no parallel projects formulated especially for women, the Royal Government is committed to incorporating measures related to the promotion of women in development into all sectoral projects and programmes, reflecting women's special needs and potential.

3.2 Commitment to Mainstreaming a Gender Perspective

Globally, it is now more widely recognised that the problem is not women's integration in development *per se*, or their lack of skills, credit and resources, but the social processes and institutions that result in inequalities between the sexes to the disadvantage of women.[18] Inequalities between women and men are not only a cost to women but also to development as a whole, and thus must be conceived as societal and development issues rather than a "women's concern." Therefore, it is not only a matter of "adding women in" to existing processes and programmes, but of reshaping these programmes to reflect the visions, interests and needs of women and to support gender equality.

Bhutan has an extremely enabling environment for gender mainstreaming. Thus, attention to equality issues is not confined to a sector called "women's development" or addressed through isolated programmes within sectors. Government agencies in Bhutan are expected to recognise that women are a major part of the public they serve and so need to design, implement and continue to support services that meet the specific needs of women as well as men. Difficulties in implementation, however, include slow absorption of information on Royal Government commitments in the Platform for Action; a lack of understanding of what the mainstreaming commitment fully entails and a continuing tendency by some officials to view women as an isolated "sector"; limited experience and skills in sectoral Ministries to undertake analyses that compare how women and men would be affected by a policy or programme; and significant gaps in the data available for the purposes of assessing policies and programmes by gender.

The starting point will be building a common understanding on the concepts of gender equality and gender mainstreaming within the system at all levels, so that there is no hesitation in addressing gender concerns. Mainstreaming efforts will be focused at three levels: policy; planning cycle; and monitoring and evaluation.

For some, a measure of the success of gender equality strategies is that equal numbers of women and men participate in a programme. But a lesson learned from experience is that equal participation at this level is not always the most relevant or effective means of ensuring that a programme supports the achievement of equality between women and men. Equality strategies in Bhutan are incorporating this lesson in two related ways: focusing on impact rather than activities/inputs, and focusing on equality as an objective rather than on women as a target group. In the long term, this holds the greatest potential to support equality between women and men.

[18] Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1998.

3.3 According Value to Women's Unpaid Work

Every society is supported not only by paid work but also by unpaid work, including housework and volunteer work. Gender role perceptions that women "specialise" in household maintenance and child-rearing activities and men in market production activities are subtly reinforced in the level and nature of labour market participation by women and men, even in some rapidly industrialising nations. The non-market economic sector ranges from subsistence crops to gathering water and fuel, to food preparation and housecleaning, to care for children and elderly, and to community management and services provided by voluntary work.

Thus, it is not sufficient to only understand the different tasks performed by women and men, but also the value accorded to those tasks. Ultimately, those values determine the status of women and men in society and their access to and control over resources such as income and decision-making power.

In comparison with other countries, in Bhutan it has been found that reproductive tasks are highly valued.[19] As detailed in Section 6.2, in analysing the productive and reproductive tasks as performed by women and men in Bhutan, it is justified to say that overall there exists a flexible task division between genders. Nonetheless, it appears that there are differences between women and men according to responsibility for an activity, time and energy invested in it, and the way an activity is valued, sometimes even by women themselves.[20]

Policy-makers and Government leaders in Bhutan will consider bold steps to address the values accorded to unpaid work. These may include a plan to co-ordinate and implement a time-use survey documenting the extent of household production that produces non-market goods and services, and the amount of unpaid and paid labour that it utilises. Another may be to incorporate the value of household production in the system of national accounts.

3.4 Conclusion

Many of the principles of CEDAW already are integrated into Bhutan's national laws, becoming part of the country's baseline for rights protection and Royal Government obligations. Bhutan also appreciates that CEDAW recognises the role of culture and tradition and calls upon States Parties to eliminate sex role stereotyping. It should be reiterated that all persons, regardless of gender, are equal before the law in Bhutan and have equal protection of the law without any discrimination. Legally, social and educational opportunities are generally not affected by sex. As will be discussed in detail in Section IV, the Royal Government has taken numerous measures to harmonise national law and policy with the provisions of the Convention, although formal monitoring of implementation of the Convention has been intermittent.

In spite of the general equality in status that women enjoy in Bhutan, the Royal Government recognises that Bhutan must not become complacent because of the comparatively high status of women and must continue to work actively toward bringing about more positive changes to women's strengths, skills and talents. The Royal Government is also aware that gender discrimination, even that which is

[19] SNV/Netherlands Development Organisation, 1993.
[20] Kinga, 1999.

unintentional, is not conducive to a fully mature approach to gender equality. The challenge ahead, therefore, is to sustain the delicate balance that has thus far been maintained between progress and age-old values, many of which have inherently protected the rights of women.

4. The Legal Status of Women (CEDAW, Articles 2/3)

CEDAW guarantees women equality before the law. In an area such as marriage and family law, perhaps most critical to women, this includes the same right to enter into marriage and to freely choose a spouse, as well as the same rights and responsibilities as parents in matters relating to their children; the same right to decide freely on the number and spacing of their children, and to have access to the information and means to enable them to exercise these rights; the right to choose a family name; and the same rights for ownership and acquisition of property. We shall now examine how Bhutanese women's rights in this and other areas of the law are protected.

Virtually no laws in Bhutan differentiate between women and men. All persons are equal before the law and are entitled to equal protection of the law without discrimination on the grounds of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, or birth or other status (Provision *OM* of *Thimzhung Chhenpo* and Section 3 of Civil and Criminal Procedure Code 2001). This provision is similar to CEDAW Article 15, which enshrines the provision stating women's equality with men before the law in any matters.

No provision is made for preferential treatment in favor of women by way of special support in education or employment, because legally women can participate in political, economic, social and cultural affairs on an equal basis with men.

However, Bhutanese customs that differentiate between women and men are still prevalent, primarily in the area of inheritance. For a majority of Bhutanese, land is inherited through the mother, because the people of western and central Bhutan, as well as some ethnic groups in eastern Bhutan, have a matrilineal family system. In the south and other parts of the east, patrilineal inheritance tends to be the norm. In both cases the parents have the final say in the distribution of family wealth and property.

In conformity with Article 2 of CEDAW, under Bhutanese law any person, whether female or male, can institute court proceedings if she or he believes her or his rights have been violated (Part II, Chapter 18, Civil and Criminal Procedure Code, 2001).

There are provisions under the Police Act, 1980 and Prison Act, 1982 which ensures the equality of men and women and protects the rights and interests of women. The provision of the Police Act states that " in order to facilitate the working of the police, women may also be recruited in the police, where they will be helpful in investigating cases involving women or to handle female prisoners or in traffic control duties." It indicates that there is no preference male over female in the recruitment of police personnel. It also says that handcuffs may not be used on any minor younger than age 13, girl or boy. The Prison Act also states that female and male prisoners must be kept separately in jail (Section Chha 4-1, (a) and that minors must be kept separately from other prisoners (Section Chha 4-1, (b). Section Chha 16-6 prohibits convicted women and minors from being given prison work " beyond their capabilities."

4.1 Marriage Act of Bhutan, 1980 (CEDAW Article 16)

Perhaps the most pertinent law regarding women is the Marriage Act of Bhutan, 1980, and its amendments, which covers not only marriage but also separation, adultery, divorce and child custody. This will be of particular interest under CEDAW, Article 16.

In matters of marriage, local practises reflect freedom and flexibility. As in other societies, however, sexual promiscuity is somehow seen as more "acceptable" for a man than a woman, although in northern Bhutan there is little social stigma attached to women who have children outside of marriage. Divorce, initiated by women as well as men, is also considered acceptable in the predominant Bhutanese communities.

The practice of polygamy and polyandry is permissible under the law, if it is done with the consent of the spouse (Section Kha 1-19 as amended in 1996). The practice of polygamy and polyandry is acceptable among southern Bhutanese, as well as parts of western and central Bhutanese and nomadic communities of the north. In many cases, if there were multiple wives they would be sisters; similarly, multiple husbands would be brothers. Subtle rebuke continues to be associated with two husbands sharing a wife, although there is no serious social taboo against this or polygamy. The general opinion among both women and men seems to be that so long as the husband can support the family, the situation is accepted.

Under Section 1.14 of the Marriage Act of 1980 the minimum age for marriage was 18 for males and 16 for females. However, in keeping with the requirement of the various international conventions particularly the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and CEDAW, the Marriage Amendment Act of 1996 has made the legal age as 18 for both sexes for all purposes. In practice, however, it is common that the young men and women choose their own partners freely. The law also protects the partner's right to love and marry of his or her own choice without discrimination based on status, caste, wealth and physical appearance (Section Kha 1-2). Even though no marriage certificate would be issued, both boys and girls engage in common-law marriage as early as age 15. The marriage is legally recognized only after obtaining marriage certificate from the court of law (Section Kha 1-8). Until very recently, virtually all marriages were common-law even though certificates were required for official recognition; educated women generally insist up
on a legal marriage. Express consent of the parties involved to the marriage is also required.

Existing vital registration laws involving both birth and death have been amended the effect that a birth certificate, which has been a great rarity, will be required to prove age for marriage and for other public purposes, such as admission to school, appointment in Government service, issuance of passport and so forth. A death certificate, also very uncommon, will be required to settle legal matters, particularly disputes over inheritance.

Section *Kha* 1-11 of the Marriage Act prohibits the traditional performance of marriages between minors. Whoever performs such marriages is to be made liable under Section *Kha* 8-20 of the same Act. In addition, Section *Kha* 1-10 states that a marriage contracted between persons within the degree of consanguinity and affinity permissible by the local custom is recognized by the law. In contravention of [this], the case shall be dealt with in accordance with Section *Kha* 9-10 and the marriage certificate shall not be issued as enshrined under Section *Kha* 1-13."

Some legal restrictions still apply regarding the marriage of a Bhutanese, either man or woman, and a non-Bhutanese, although these are generally ignored except in the case of children's citizenship. Marriage to a non-Bhutanese does not automatically change the nationality of a woman, render her stateless or force her to

acquire the nationality of the husband. If the husband of a Bhutanese woman changes his nationality, she is nevertheless allowed to make her own decision to do likewise or not.

In cases of adultery, the person who commits adultery must pay compensation(Gao) to the aggrieved spouse as per Section Kha 3-1 of the Marriage Amendment Act of 1996. At the same time, Section *Kha* 8-1 of the Amendment to the Marriage Act 1996 protects an unmarried woman who becomes pregnant; if she brings suit, the man found liable is required to pay an amount equal to the national daily wage for 10 months to the woman toward the cost of her medical treatment, besides child support allowances equivalent to 20% of his monthly income.

Divorce is not uncommon, because unlike many other countries, Bhutan has no prohibition against it. There is social stigma or taboo attached to divorce. Both women and men remarry without social prejudice, with or without children from previous marriages. Greater attention will be given to the growing problem of full acceptance of children, both girls and boys, by some stepparents, which can lead to child abuse. Either the woman or the man may initiate the divorce, and either party can be held responsible for compensating their partner. If a couple divorces, personal property acquired before the marriage reverts to the original owners (Section Ga 6-3 of the Inheritance Act 1980), while property acquired during the marriage is divided equally between the husband, wife and children if any.

With respect to the custody of the children, the mother under Section *Kha* 7-2 is awarded custody of children younger than age 9, regardless of who bears responsibility for the separation. Further, under Section Kha 7-3(1) as amended in 1996, the custody of a child under the age 9 shall be given to the mother. The child support allowance shall be provided by the father according to the terms of the negotiated agreement, failing which, the father shall pay 20% of his monthly income to each child, with the total child support allowance not exceeding 40%, until the children reach age 18.

At the same time, Section *Kha* 8-19, "Imposition of punishment for incest," defines incest as "where a marriage is contracted between a couple debarred from being married to each other in accordance with the prevalent customs in the different villages"; this refers to the common practice of cousin marriage. Both the woman and the man involved are to be sentenced to three months in prison.

When there exists a *lacuna* in the law or where there is ambiguity in the interpretation of laws relating to the crime of incest, the High Court can consider the following two general provisions, the first being *Kadyon Ka* 2, which states: "Every Judge shall decide a case strictly in accordance with the provisions of the *Thrimzhung Chhenpo* without any regard to the rank or status of the parties before the Court. In the interpretation of the *Thrimzhung Chhenpo*, where any section is ambiguous or is capable of differing interpretations, the decision of the majority Judges of the High Court shall prevail."

Secondly, Sections *Na* 1-1(a) and (b) of the *Thrimzhung Chhenpo* state: "No one shall defame or falsely accuse an innocent person. An offender, who through words either spoken or written publicly and falsely imputes the reputation or a person for murder, armed robbery, any prohibition or treason with an intention of harming that person's reputation shall be imprisoned from one month to three years and pay compensation for one month to three years to the aggrieved party calculated in accordance with the *chathrim* [proclamation] for national wage rate. Where such false imputation of the reputation of a person is on any matter other than murder, armed robbery and treason, the offender shall pay compensation to the aggrieved party for one month to five years, calculated in accordance with the *chathrim* for national wage rate."

Regarding adoption of a child, the Sixty Seventh Session of the National Assembly, 1988 had passed the resolution whereby "adoption of children whether Bhutanese or non-nationals should be permitted provided the cases are processed through the Thrimkhangs (Courts) and appropriate agreements stating that the child would be entitled to full benefits under the Inheritance Act as applicable to natural born children are undertaken. The children so adopted through these procedures shall be recognised by the Ministry of Home Affairs and the Thrimkhangs as foster children and shall be permitted to be registered in the census as citizens." This resolution protects the paramount interest of the adopted child and it applies to both girls and boys and the law does not discriminate against each other.

4.2 Rape Act, 1996 (Article 9)

Turning to the Rape Act, 1996, which amends the sections of the Marriage Act dealing with the offence of rape, this crime is defined as having "sexual intercourse with a person under any of the following circumstances: without his/her consent; use of any force; or with his/her consent when the consent is obtained by putting him/her in fear of death or of hurt" (Ba 2.1.1) Overall, comparatively few rapes are reported in Bhutan, but there was a sharp increase in reporting of sexual offences in general in 2000 [see Table 4.1, Annex B]. This could be due to victims being made more aware of their rights under the Rape Act through imposition of severe penalty on convicts and also award of reasonably higher amount of compensation to victims.

In addition to paying compensation to the rape victim, the Act provides that the rapist shall be imprisoned for a term of one to five years (Section *Ba* 2.2.1). This is a significant increase over the previous penalty, which was only three months' imprisonment. In the case of gang rape, compensation to the victim is complemented by the perpetrators' imprisonment for three to seven years (Section *Ba* 2.3.1). The Rape Act removed the previous reference that in a gang rape the woman must be shown to be of "good moral character" before fines or prison sentences could be imposed.

With regard to the rape of a minor, Section *Ba* 2.6.1 states that if a girl or boy aged above 12 and below 18 years is raped, imprisonment shall be for five to 10 years, as well as compensation paid; if the victim is younger than age 12, the mandatory sentence is 10 to 13 years' imprisonment. Gang rape results in sentences of 10 to 15 years or 15 to 17 years, depending on the age of the victim (BA 2.7.1 & 2). There is scope for improvement in counseling or intervention following hospital treatment of victims, including children, with sexually transmitted diseases. Should the victim, whether adult or child, die in the course of a rape, life imprisonment is mandated, in addition to compensation; in the case of gang rape, the leader of the gang must serve a life sentence, while each of the other rapists must be imprisoned for 17 years to life (BA 2.10.1).

The aforementioned general provisions *Kadyon Ka* 2 and Sections *Na* 1-1 (a) and (b) – which cover "any section [of the law] that is ambiguous or is capable of differing interpretations" as well as defamation related to "any prohibition" – also are considered relevant to the crimes of sexual assault that fall short of rape, including attempted rape, domestic assault, molestation, and sexual abuse of children that does not constitute rape itself. In the Marriage Act, two sections deal with some of these crimes, to wit, "Imposition of fine on outraging the modesty of a woman while asleep" (Section *Kha* 8-22) and "Punishment for outraging the modesty of a woman by drugging her"(Section *Kha* 8-23).

With regard to prostitution under Article 6 of CEDAW, it should be noted that prostitution in Bhutan is not a big issue like other countries in the region. Only few cases of prostitution are being reported across the Indian borders. The case of trafficking in women is not prevalent in Bhutan. However, prostitution and trafficking in women is considered by law as crime. Bhutan has signed the SAARC Convention on Preventing

and Combating Trafficking in Women and Children for Prostitution, and there are plans for its ratification in the 81st session of the National Assembly. Accordingly, Bhutan will enact legislation on Prevention of Immoral Trafficking in Women and Children.

4.3 Bhutan Citizenship Act, 1985 (CEDAW, Article 9)

In the area of citizenship, Bhutanese nationality can be acquired three ways under the Bhutan Citizenship Act, 1985:

- By birth, if both parents are citizens;
- By registration, if the person was officially registered in the census and living in Bhutan before the end of 1958, the date of the first citizenship act;
- By naturalisation, when the person must be at least 21 years old, or 15 years old in the case of a child only one of whose parents, mother or father, is a citizen. In these latter cases, the person also must have lived in Bhutan for all 15 years; be able to speak, read and write Dzongkha proficiently; and have good knowledge of the culture and traditions of Bhutan, among other requirements. For Government servants, the requirement is 20 years.

In the area of naturalisation, the Amendments and Resolutions of the 67th Session of the National Assembly, 1988, record that His Majesty the King, appearing before the National Assembly, stated that "in accordance with the Citizenship Acts promulgated in 1958, 1977 and 1985, children of Bhutanese men married to non-nationals prior to 1985 were automatically eligible for citizenship. In the case of women, however, her husband and children would, according to the law, not be considered as citizens." His Majesty suggested "special residence" permits, limited to those married before the coming in force of the 1985 Act.

According to the aforesaid Amendment both men and women have equal rights to acquire, change or retain their nationality. Marriage to non-Bhutanese does not change the nationality of women. She is neither rendered stateless nor forced to acquire the nationality of the husband. Even in the event of her husband changing nationality she is free to make her own decision. The mere fact that the Bhutanese women married to non-Bhutanese does not make her stateless. To be eligible for citizenship one has to fulfill the criteria enumerated under the naturalisation clause. Even the grant of nationality to non-Bhutanese spouses shall be governed by the aforesaid clause. As long as the applicant fulfills the requirements enumerated under the naturalisation clause of the Bhutan Citizenship Act, 1985 his/her right to acquire Bhutanese Citizenship by naturalisation will not be denied.

4.4 Inheritance Act, 1980, and Other Acts (CEDAW, Articles 13&15)

Under CEDAW, equal rights to conclude contracts and administer property, as well as freedom to choose one's residence, are particular guarantees of equality before the law in civil matters. Indeed, access to land and credit are among the rights most important to rural women worldwide.

In the realm of inheritance, traditional practices of matriarchal inheritance system still apply in most Bhutanese families and many women inherit the land, particularly in western and central Bhutan and among those who take care of elderly parents. Bhutan is thus perhaps one of the few countries in the world that places such a value on taking care of the family, enshrining and promoting it in inheritance laws.[21] In southern and

[21] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.

parts of eastern Bhutan, meanwhile, men tend to be the inheritors. Not only does the system of inheritance vary from region to region, but it also sometimes differs from village to village within the same district. Property is defined as land, houses, grain, head of cattle and other material property. Overall, 60% of rural women hold land registration titles, while 45% of property titles in urban areas (shares, building and business licenses) are registered to women.[22]

The Inheritance Act, 1980, makes no restriction upon whether a woman or a man can inherit property, as long as she or he is a Bhutanese citizen. Women and girls are included as members of the joint family who are eligible for inheritance. Moreover, a daughter-in-law who has been married to a member of a joint family and who has lived with that family for at least 10 years is also defined as a member (Ga 2-3). Excluded, however, are members of the family who already have received a share of property and live separately (Ga 2-4), or those who have lived separately for at least 10 years even without a share of property (Ga 2-4(2))

Under the prevalent system, parents tend to divide the property equally among daughters, which protects their economic independence. Even if land holdings and houses are very small, the daughters generally must share them equally.

Other Acts also have provisions of importance to women and girls [see Annexes]. These include:

- The Land Act of 1979, which includes registration of land in the names of women or men aged 18 (originally 16 years for females; amended through Point 19 of the 14th Judiciary Conference 1998 and Chief Justice Order No. HC [*KA*-33], 2002/2150). This Act states that a spouse, such as the husband of a woman who has inherited land, cannot sell that land without rightful ownership;
- The Loan Act of 1981, which allows women to obtain loans or mortgages themselves. It prohibits minors, girls or boys, from being given loans;

5. Promotion and Advancement of Women (CEDAW, Articles 2/3)

5.1 Women and development policies in Bhutan

Bhutan's national policy on women is reflected in the overall objectives and strategies for women in development and has been incorporated in all development plans. This policy is very brief and has been paraphrased in Section 3.1: "While there will be no parallel projects formulated specifically for women, measures related to the promotion of women in development will be incorporated in all sectoral projects and programmes. Appropriate policies and development planning will enhance the contribution of women by reflecting their special needs, role and potential."

More specifically, in the Ninth Plan it is stated, "As the economy and society modernises, diverse needs emerge prompting shifts in traditional roles and responsibilities, value systems, transformation of family patterns and rural-urban migration, amongst others. Experiences have revealed that during such a transition, women and children are particularly vulnerable. The Royal Government acknowledges the emerging economic and social trends and has committed resources and redirected its plans and programmes to improve Mother and Child Health and mainstream gender needs and interests."[23]

[22] Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001.
[23] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

Bhutan has planned and implemented gender-sensitive programmes in nutrition as well as Mother and Child Health; improved and expanded educational projects through a national (non-formal) literacy programme; identified and financed economic programmes that would address income issues for women; and instituted legal reform. The Royal Government recognises the need to further formulate appropriate strategies sensitive to women's needs within the mainstream development process. These may include:

- Required gender awareness training for Royal Government employees;
- Encouragement of more and better public information and education on women's rights;
- Promotion of child day care facilities for working women in urban areas and development of a national policy related to flexible time for breast-feeding women as well as to maternity and paternity leave, so that both parents are able to support and share care-giving roles for a new child;
- Retention of girls in higher levels of schooling/education;
- Continued enhancement of existing reproductive health services, including a formal reproductive health/sex education curriculum in schools so that young adults, especially women, are aware of and have access to knowledge and services related to puberty, conception, contraception, sexually transmitted disease and HIV/AIDS prevention, and sexual abuse.

Article 4 of CEDAW allows for temporary measures of affirmative action and binds States Parties to seek to modify cultural patterns of behaviour and attitudes regarding the sexes; it also attempt to impose standards of equality and non-discrimination in private as well as public life. Although Bhutan has undertaken no specific affirmative action measures and has not singled out various sub-groups of women for special consideration, the Royal Government has stated repeatedly that it remains fully committed to achieving equal representation for women.

5.2 National Women's Association of Bhutan

The National Women's Association of Bhutan was established in 1981, under Resolution 33 passed by the 53rd National Assembly, to improve women's socio-economic conditions and to encourage their participation in development activities. It has been designated as the public entity to oversee the implementation of CEDAW in the country.

The objectives of the NWAB are listed as the following:

- To strengthen the bond of loyalty, love and devotion between the people and His Majesty the King;
- To improve the living standards and socio-economic status of women, especially rural women;
- To create an awareness among women of the importance of proper maternal and child care, nutrition, clean drinking water and hygiene, in order to improve the general health of the people;
- To encourage women to take an active part in the implementation of socio-economic development programmes and in all other nation-building activities;
- To inculcate in women pride in the rich social, cultural and spiritual heritage of the country;
- To promote harmony, understanding and friendship among all people, especially among rural people.

Since its inception, the NWAB, with more than 400 members in nationwide chapters, has undertaken a variety of activities in collaboration with Royal Government agencies, particularly in rural areas, covering family health, sanitation, non-formal education and income generation. It has, for example, provided training programmes to more than 14,000 women to enhance income-generating skills in such areas as weaving, knitting and tailoring. Assistance in the provision of microcredit to rural women and support to the education of disadvantaged children also has been priorities. Another major initiative of the NWAB has been the installation of more than 13,000 fuel-efficient smokeless stoves in rural areas. This has reduced the drudgery of cooking over traditional open stoves for many women and has generally reduced health risks.

The NWAB has also introduced a Rural Credit and Savings Scheme in Trashigang district which covers the six eastern districts providing collateral free loans and encouraging women to take up productive enterprises to generate income and inculcate saving habits. The scheme has benefited more than 1500 women. The Association is also involved in charitable social activities such as sponsoring the education of over 100 underprivileged children nationwide.

6. Family Life (CEDAW, Article 5)

The family, in its nuclear and extended form, is the most important unit in Bhutanese society, as in any other society. Family members are close to each other and support one another emotionally and financially, especially in times of crisis, such as illness, death and other calamities. It is very common, for example, to see a child whose parents live and work in the village being brought up by another member of the family living in town, to ensure that the child completes her or his education and gets a good start in life.[24]

The average size of the Bhutanese household or family is estimated to be 5.6,[25] with extended family groups of 7 or 8 members extensively found. The senior woman is responsible for nurturing, symbolised by her daily role in serving food at mealtimes. Normally a cluster of adults and elder siblings forms the group caretaker for the younger children, with the father and other senior men also taking an active part. When children reach the age of about 8, they begin to perform certain household duties.

Rights that reflect the realities of most women's lives around the world focus on autonomy within the family, conditions suitable for healthy reproduction, sufficient economic resources to sustain oneself and one's family, and adequate food and shelter. Gender-neutral policies in other countries often fail to protect girls and women from the kinds of discrimination that threaten their autonomy, their security, and even their lives. But in Bhutan, as described in Section II, neither fathers nor mothers generally state preferences for boy children over girls. After a woman has given birth, at least in northern Bhutan, the husband traditionally takes care of the wife and the household chores.

Under CEDAW, the States' obligation to work for equality in private life is manifested, in particular, in the family. Indeed, both CEDAW and the Convention for the Rights of the Child, to which Bhutan also is a States Party, seek to strengthen supportive, caring, meaningful relationships within the family. Thus, Bhutan supports a family in which women and men enjoy equal rights and responsibilities, and girls enjoy the rights to equal opportunities with their male siblings.

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[24] Royal Government of Bhutan, 1999.

[25] Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Planning, 1996.

6.1 Differences in Responsibilities Among Families

The family is, unquestionably, the sphere where rights for women are most crucial, while laws worldwide tend to give priority to civil and political rights, devaluing social, cultural and economic rights and marginalising some of women's most pressing concerns. In Bhutan, many of these issues have been minimised or eliminated relative to the situation of women found in other nations.

Nevertheless, the social status of women in Bhutan varies between ethnic communities. Generally speaking, women in the Ngalong and Sharchop communities in northern and eastern Bhutan have more social freedom as well as recognition of their economic contribution and enjoy relative equality with men. In the Lhotshampa communities of the south, a more overt patriarchal value system is found, women's social freedom is far more restricted and their economic contributions undervalued. In these latter communities, a caste system still exists along with the social tradition of male domination, although this pattern has been somewhat modified through exposure to the prevailing norms.

Thus, women in northern and eastern Bhutan are considered more representative of the family, whereas it is men accorded that status in southern Bhutan. For example, in most Bhutanese households the entire household sits down together for meals and there are no cultural barriers that discriminate against female members of the household during mealtimes, as in many other countries. This is often not the case in southern Bhutan, however, where the Hindu culture still expects women to eat only after the men have finished, and separately as well.

As in other societies, violence against women appears to be committed particularly in the family sphere. Many women concede that marital violence occurs in Bhutanese society, although the frequency of quarrels and physical abuse may vary.[26] Because marital violence is equated only with physical battery, psychological and sexual abuses generally are excluded. This will be examined in much more detail in Section XII. At the same time, there also appear to be a number of cases of violence against men committed by women.[27]

In rural Bhutan, where both women and men work, most household decisions are jointly made by both genders, again depending on the ethnic community involved. Major decisions include the education of children; purchase of land or cattle; choice of crops for the season, and marriage of adult children. If food items in the larder run out or if school fees for children have to be paid, then the wife is responsible for informing the husband, who is then expected to procure the items or provide money to pay for them.

Although husbands and wives jointly own the farm resources, women usually have most control of family income; again, this largely depends on ethnicity. In general, men in the south tend to have more control and influence over decision-making than women do. Outside the home, men and women generally receive equal pay for equal work, even in the area of unskilled labour.

In families where men have migrated to urban areas, women and children have to cope with a heavier workload and also bear the onus of all decision making.[28] At the same time, some evidence from limited

[26] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001; Kinga, 1999.
[27] Kinga, 1999.
[28] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.

studies suggests that men outside the home, such as in urban areas, are in growing instances making decisions that greatly influence, if not control, the domestic sphere back in the rural areas.

By virtue of the woman's presence at home, however, she is more decisive and influential in deciding the work programmes and finalising dates for various agricultural activities, particularly when exchange of labour is involved. She would have to be consulted by her husband regarding for whom he had to work on a particular day. When other farmers ask men to come and work for them, the decision would be deferred until their wives were consulted because they might have agreed to send the man to work for someone else instead. Overall, it appears that women are considered more reliable.[29]

6.2 Women's and Men's Tasks

Because rural women traditionally have less mobility than men, particularly in southern Bhutan, they tend to stay near their houses and villages, and men undertake any task that requires distant travel and assume the public face of the family. With strength being a valued asset in an agrarian and pastoral society, men, by virtue of their stronger physique, came to be associated with what is known as "outdoor works," such as plowing fields, felling trees, fetching bamboo, carpentry and masonry.

"Indoor works," by contrast, are household chores, which ostensibly require less input of strength. Cooking food, child care, kitchen gardening, brewing alcohol, milking cows and weaving are some of the works categorised as "indoor," as is fetching water, which is done by women and girls in about 80% of households.[30] The multiplicity of women's work in completing these chores greatly competes with their ability to work in the fields.

Women themselves state that the work categorised as outdoor and done by men are more laborious and that they would not be able to do them. Interestingly, both rural women and men in one survey maintained that only the outdoor work had value and productivity.[31] Thus, although the final output of men's work definitely depends on women's performance "indoors," women's contributions may be undervalued.

At the same time, both genders claim that men are incapable of doing work solely done by women over the ages. For example, many men cannot plant paddy seedlings or weed crops, although these are "outdoor works;" even when they do, women say they feel that the work done is below the required standard.

6.3 Traditional and Contemporary Marriages

Although many Bhutanese choose their own partners, parents often arrange marriages as well. Because many children in rural areas marry at early ages, parents consider them immature to make wise decisions and therefore intervene. Consultations at various levels precede any marriage. Only a few children disobey and marry the person of their own choice. The practice of marriage among consanguinity is prevalent among eastern Bhutanese and some sections of southern Bhutanese, as noted in Section 4.1. This practice is not considered incestuous if it confirms to local customs and practice, and is permitted by law (Kha 1-10).

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[29] Kinga, 1999.
[30] Buringa and Tshering, 1992.
[31] Kinga, 1999.

While some parents say that arranged marriages work better in rural areas, many increasingly believe that marriages by choice are acceptable. It should be noted that educated women in particular do not approve of, or generally accede to, arranged marriages

Marriages also function as a mechanism of exchanging work forces between families, a very important consideration. Sons are usually sent out in marriages, while daughters stay home, except in southern Bhutan, where the pattern is reversed. Intermarriages among various castes of southern Bhutanese society were condemned in the past, but these restrictions largely no longer apply.[32]

Because a daughter's marriage generally brings an additional worker into the family, and because this is such a crucial issue in rural areas, many people still believe that the earlier girls marry, the better. Husbands also are sought to substitute in the fields for aging parents, who normally say that they need a son-in-law who will take over the plow for them.

As noted in Section 4.1, no serious social stigma is associated with divorce or remarriage. Both widows and widowers can remarry and have children without social stigma in northern Bhutan, whereas this would be socially unacceptable in the south. Widows have equal status in the society and there is no social sigma attached to widowhood. If husband dies, rest of the family member helps the widow and her children. In most cases widows inherit her demised husband's property and will always have place to live.

7. Education of Women (CEDAW, Article 10)

Modern education in Bhutan started very modestly in the late 1950s. Until then, monastic education, exclusively male, was almost the only form of formal education available. While monastic education continues to be an important part of the national culture, modern education has been promoted and expanded only since since the beginning of the First Five Year Plan (1961-1965) to help meet basic educational needs as well as to enhance human resources essential for the nation's further socio-economic development.

In the earlier years of modern development, boys were preferred to be sent to school by their families because of the distances, hardships and many inconveniences involved, and because of the traditional viewpoint that daughters were more helpless and vulnerable. Parents commonly struggled hard to keep their children home; often children had to be almost forcibly taken from the village. To send children to school was looked upon as a kind of taxation that should be evaded if possible. Thus, enrollment for girls was initially very low indeed.

Now, however, the situation has improved considerably, and girls accounted for about 46% of a total school enrolment of 116,186 students in 2000 [see Table 7.1, Annex B]. Girls' enrolment is increasing faster than boys', and girls constitute nearly 46% at primary level and 44% at secondary level. They also constitute 24% of the total enrolment in institutes providing technical education. Improving enrolment of girls in schools, in particular their proportion in higher education levels, vocational training, science and technology, is an important objective of the Ninth Five Year Plan to ensure development and empowerment of women.[33]

The Royal Government has made a special effort to bring schools closer to communities and increase the level of girls enrolled by establishing community schools across the nation. More than 150 such schools have been constructed, with a further 134 proposed during the Ninth Plan. The introduction of WFP feeding in

[32] Ibid.

[33] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

schools has also contributed towards the increase of girls' enrolment in schools. In order to cater to remote places, schools will be constructed within 3 km or one hour's walking distance.[34] This is addressing one of the main causes for non-enrolment quoted by parents, which is the distance to school. Further, there is provision for establishing boarding facilities in Community Primary Schools that have to cater to very scattered population because they do not fit into the 3 km. criteria. Overall, more schools and institutions in general have been built, hostel facilities introduced and road communication improved to enhance mobility, also seemingly reducing parents' mental dread of distance from their daughters.

7.1 The Modern Education System

Within three and a half decades, the Royal Government was able to create a modern education system from primary to tertiary level. Although the gross primary enrolment rate was estimated at 72% in 2001, enrolment at all levels has grown steadily over the years. However, 45 *gewogs*, or nearly 20% of gewogs nationwide, still report below the national average for the overall primary enrolment rate.[35]

The present educational structure, which is all co-educational, consists of one year of pre-primary, six years of primary, six years of secondary (two years lower secondary, two years of middle secondary and two years of higher secondary), and three years of undergraduate. Access from one level to the next is based on merit and determined by national and external examinations, as well as by the student space available and, at higher levels, by national human resource considerations.

The educational infrastructure consists of some 251 primary and community schools, 59 junior high schools, 26 high schools and a range of other institutions that provide specialised education as well as tertiary and vocational training.[36] Since 1977, the number of educational institutions has more than tripled, from 112 to 361, while the number of teachers has quadrupled from around 922 to 3,736.[37]

National examinations are held at class VIII, X and XII level. Currently, about 85% of test takers qualify to continue their education beyond the primary level, while the rest either repeat, go back to their farms, join a training program relevant to their level or get employment with the Government or private sector.

In secondary education in 2000, six high schools also were providing junior college education (Classes XI-XII). Enrollment at the lower secondary (Classes VII-VIII) and middle secondary school levels (Classes IX-X) was 14,429 and 8,872 respectively; the latter represents an annual growth rate of more than 35%. Bhutan also has established Sherubtse College and six vocational and other training institutes, as well as 14 Buddhist schools.[38]

Bhutanese women and girls also enjoy the right to participate in all sports activities, whether in school or outside of school. However, rural women are generally busy with productive work and have very little time for recreational activities. In urban areas, however, girls are beginning to participate more extensively in sports.

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[34] Ibid.
[35] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.
[36] Royal Government of Bhutan, Education Department, 2001.
[37] Ibid.
[38] Ibid.

7.2 Educational Policies and Goals

The Ninth Plan calls for further enhancing educational coverage and states that "counseling and guidance catering to the special needs of students, and girls in particular, will be strengthened in the schools." The policy of constructing schools within 3 km or one-hour walking distance to cater to remote places may also further encourage families to send daughters to school. The overall educational objectives for the Ninth Plan include:

- Providing support mechanisms for Early Childhood Care and Development for children between 0-6 years on a pilot basis;
- Enhancing enrolment of children between 6-12 years of age in primary schools to 90%-95% by 2007;
- Enhancing the quality of education comparable to international standards;
- Improving and expanding youth guidance and career counseling and values education for wholesome development of youth;
- Increasing the basic level of education from Class VIII to X;
- Increasing the promotion proportion from Class X to XI from 38% to 56% by 2007;
- Developing a higher education system under the umbrella of a national university;
- Enhancing the literacy rate from 54% to 80% and establishing a system of continuing and lifelong education opportunities;
- Establishing a programme of inclusive education for children who are physically and mentally challenged;
- Strengthening and improving the education management system, with particular emphasis on school-level management;
- Developing a more sustainable education system through the introduction of private participation and cost-sharing measures.[39]

At the primary level, the growth in enrolment has far outpaced the planned provision of places. During the Seventh Plan (1992-1997), for example, enrolment increased at an average of 8% per annum, against the expansion of infrastructure at 6% annually. Secondary enrolment had been proportionately a rather insignificant component in the Bhutanese education system; however, the relative demand for secondary education is increasing very rapidly indeed. This is mainly a result of the expansion of primary education and improvement in the retention capacities of the schools.

Universal enrolment at the primary and junior high levels, which naturally has gender implications, is a target that has been identified as worthy of pursuing "with the greatest urgency."[40] Although that may be within reach, universal enrolment at the high school level will take longer.

7.3 Dropouts and Repeaters

Universal primary education targets by 2007 can only be realized if the dropout level is brought down to zero. From Classes PP to VI, no significant gender disparities in dropout rates at the national level are reported. The main reasons for children dropping out of schools are reportedly the distance to schools, fear for the personal safety of girls, the cost of sending children to school, children being needed to help at home, poor

[39] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

[40] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat, 1999.

academic performance, poor health and being "too old" for school. The rate of repetition, while high, does not differ significantly between girls and boys.

7.4 Female Role Models, Constraints and Career Choices

The number of women in the teaching force is increasing steadily over the years. From virtually zero in the 1960s women now comprise 987 out of 3,045 in 2000 (this of course includes expatriate teachers). Increasing the number of female teachers, especially in rural schools, may stimulate more girls to enroll for primary and secondary education. However, because of the hardships being faced in the remote areas female teachers are more sympathetically considered in terms of their placement. As a result there are fewer female teachers posted in the remote Community Primary Schools.

At the household level, parents tended to agree on future expectations for their children, whereby education was regarded as somewhat more relevant for boys than for girls. One analysis in another study with limited representation and coverage has argued that the sacrifice that girls make in staying on the farm is clear: It is in order for their male siblings to go to school and reciprocate later, once they have a job in the cash economy.[41]

It appears that a growing number of Bhutanese girls who are being educated are beginning to choose more untraditional careers. The Royal Bhutan Institute of Technology (RBIT) School that offers three-year diploma level courses in civil, electrical and mechanical engineering, for example, had an all-male enrolment of 148 students in 1984. Today, out of the total enrolment of 307 students 45 are women. Similarly, at the Royal technical Institute offering two year certificate level courses in auto-mechanic, mechanical, electrical, civil construction and computer hardware, women began to enter after 1984. Currently there are 157 women out of 425 students enrolled at the institute. For several other training centers, the pattern of change over the last decade has been similar. Girls now comprise 26 of 139 students at the National Institute for Zorig Chusum (NITC), 11 of 45 students at the Trashiyangtse Institute for Zorig Chusum, 1 of 83 trainees at the National Driving Institute (NDTI), and 29 of 62 trainees at the Construction Training Centre (CTC).

In addition, many girls are also joining the training institutes of the health and agriculture sectors. At the Royal Institute of Health Sciences, which conducts training programs for general nurse midwives, auxiliary nurse midwives, health assistants, basic health workers, assistant nurses and technicians, female students have accounted for about half the enrollment.

The number of girls continuing on to higher studies has also been increasing. Compared to only 28 girls enrolled in degree programmes, there are now 188 girls out the total enrolment of 625 in Sherubtse College and 73 girls out of the total enrolment 225 in the Institute of Languge and Culture.

7.5 Non-Formal Education and Disparities in Literacy

For out-of-school youth and adults, especially women, the non-formal education programme, initiated by the Royal Government during the Seventh Plan (1992-1997) after being introduced by the NWAB in 1991, provides functional literacy and numeracy skills. A total of 292 centers have been established throughout Bhutan, from a start of six NFE classes in 1992. The number educated under the program has been more than

[41] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.

12,000 – more than half since 1996 – with women comprising up to 80% of the students. Most learners are aged 15 to 26, although some are older. About 65% of learners complete the course.[42]

Given the increasing demands for the programme, a non-formal education unit was established in 1996 within the Education Division (then), which oversees this programme now and has enabled a strengthening of literacy programmes within the country. The Education Department employs its teachers from the formal education system as well as class ten leavers as NFE instructors, providing additional training and monetary incentives for this purpose.

The Department is working towards ensuring that there are more female NFE instructors so that they could be role models for the main target population, rural women. In addition to the recruitment of trained instructors, a curriculum for adult education has been developed and follow-up initiated with more materials on post-literacy that are related to skills such as agriculture, sanitation and health. It remains to be seen whether this increased attention to follow-up will prevent newly literate women, as happens in many other countries, from being unable to apply the skills they have acquired and relapsing into illiteracy.

Overall, the rate of literacy in 2002 is estimated at 54%, up from 17% in 1977 and 28% as recently as 1984. Gender-disaggregated official statistics are largely unavailable, but it is believed that the total female literacy rate is only about half that of men, and perhaps as low as 18%. The adult illiterate population above 18 years is estimated to be about 150,000 to 180,000 people.[43] In urban areas, the literacy rate of respondents in the pilot gender study was almost three times that of respondents in rural areas [68% and 25% respectively]; 75% of rural women in the "reproductive" age group 20-40 were illiterate, which has implications on the ability to make informed choices about themselves and their families and may restrict their opportunities. For the school-going age group of 11-20, fewer girls (65%) were literate than boys (75%).[44]

Both men and women in Bhutan realise the importance of being literate, saying that not to be literate is like having to "walk with eyes closed."[45] Improving the literacy and numeracy rates dramatically is one of the ambitious goals of the Ninth Plan, so that more non-formal education centres will be established to cover half of the population by the end of the Plan. The objective is to have the entire population be literate in the national language and numerate by 2012.

7.6 Conclusion

In Bhutan as elsewhere, the lack of women's education represents a constraint to full gender equality. More stress is being given to educational opportunities, particularly for girls. Moreover, universal enrolment is perhaps the highest priority in the country's education sector.

Turning to the long-term development outlook, a particularly challenging scenario is found. Although the population growth rate is projected to decline further to 1.63% per annum in 2011-12 and to 1.31% in 2016-17, the population is expected to reach 931,711 during the latter period from the current 698,000. The proportion of the population below the age of 15 years, which is about 39% now,

[42] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.
[43] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.
[44] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.
[45] Ibid.

is considered likely to increase and will induce a correspondingly higher expenditure on education as well as health.[46]

Thus, there will be a considerable increase in the school-age population and the cost of schooling at all levels, even if fertility is drastically reduced. For example, the lower secondary and middle secondary population of ages 13-16 is estimated to be around 79,965, or 51% larger, in the year 2017 than in 1997. (The size of the primary school-age population is expected to increase only marginally.)

The estimated recurrent cost of schooling at lower secondary and middle secondary school levels alone, at the 1997 level (adjusted for inflation), will be around Nu. 342.5 million (US$8.16 million), or 71% higher in 2017 than in 1997. The cost of school at primary level will increase by a more modest 12%, from Nu. 231.0 million (US$5.50 million) in 1997 to Nu. 258.5 million (US$6.16 million) in 2017. As such, Bhutan's alarm over the continuing very high rate of population is understandable, as is its emphasis on formulating a comprehensive population policy and programme by closely examining the implications of population growth and spatial distribution for employment, environment, health care, quality of life and overall sustainable development.

Human resources, which are decisive to the development of all sectors, must be developed in all communities, particularly rural communities. Primary education and literacy programmes have a crucial role in opening up capacities for innovation and development in rural areas, especially among Bhutanese women.

The benefits of education also can be enhanced by making curricula more sensitive to the needs of rural life. Extension programmes in the Renewable Natural Resources sector can help to promote more knowledge and understanding among the adult population in rural areas. Building on efforts to encourage the education of girls, the Royal Government will do even more in the future to ensure genuine equality.

8. Women's Access to Health (CEDAW, Article 12)

Health problems that women face needs to be seen in the context of other factors that adversely affect their health. For example, a woman's health is inextricably linked to her social status and reflects her self-worth, her social value in the community in which she lives, and her access to timely and appropriate health care. Nutrition, environment, availability of health services, culture and attitudes, education, standard of living and income all are decisive for health.

Women's health, particularly in the realm of reproductive health, is identified as a priority in the policies and programmes of the Royal Government of Bhutan. All health care is free and provided by the Royal Government through the primary health care system and some special vertical health programmes. However, because women are prone to more health risks, given their role in childbearing, special attention is devoted to women's health care.

Although Bhutan has traditionally emphasised on MCH and Family Planning, it has now begun to view women's health in a more holistic way, as part of the overall life cycle. Since very high population growth rate has overarching negative implications for all sectors of development in the country, the Royal Government in 1995 declared itself on a "war footing" against continuation of this trend. Thus, considerable attention is being given to reproductive health, including Mother and Child

[46] Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Planning, 1996.

Health, which are aimed at improving the health status of mothers and children through provision of antenatal, postnatal care and family planning services.

Alarmingly, a very high proportion of births – more than 30% – are to young women. The total fertility rate in 2000 was 4.7 children per woman of reproductive age, down from 5.6 in 1994; the general fertility rate per 1,000 women of reproductive age in 2000 was 142.7, down from 172.7 in 1994.[47]

Positive changes in health seeking behaviour will be prioritised. In the National Health Survey 2000, it was found that 22% of respondents who had fallen ill in the month preceding the survey had not sought medical care; a goal of the Ninth Plan is to increase the number of health facilities and to improve the quality of health services so that it would encourage communities to seek health care during illnesses.

8.1. The Modern Health System and Health Indicators

Bhutan has a decentralised system of health care. 29 Hospitals, 160 Basic Health Units and 447 Outreach Clinics deliver free basic health care services to even the remotest part of the nation. Inspite of Bhutan's rugged terrain and highly dispersed population, the basic health coverage today stands over 90%, which is highly commendable. This represents a sharp increase even from 1992-93, when health service coverage was about 70%, and reflects a significant rise in Basic Health Units and outreach clinics in particular. Moreover, many health units in remote areas are connected with telephones now, increasing the access to health and other facilities and also benefiting the communities in reaching out to the outside world. Bhutanese are able to draw upon the knowledge and skills of 109 trained doctors, 148 health assistants, 443 trained nurses, 178 Basic Health Workers and more than 1,300 Village Health Workers [see Table 8.1, Annex B]. To further improve the quality of services through shared human resources, Bhutan initiated the telemedicine project connecting for now Mongar Regional Hospital to Jigmi Dorji Wangchuck National Referral Hospital.

Bhutan has made significant improvement in the reduction of infant and maternal mortality rates.

Indicators	1984	1994	2000
Infant mortality rate (per 1000 live births	102.8	70.7	60.5
Under five mortality rate (per 1000 live births	162.4	96.9	84.0
Maternal mortality rate (per 1000 live births	7.7	3.8	2.55

From 1984 to 2000, the infant mortality rate and the maternal mortality rate were more than halved, from 102.8 to 60.5 per 1,000 live births and from 7.7 to 2.5 per 1000 live births respectively, while the under-5 mortality rate fell from 162 to 84 per 1,000 live births. Because these figures are still quite high compared to most nations, the Royal Government is committed to further reductions, particularly for maternal mortality, where the immediate goal is reduce to less than 200 per 100,000 live births early in the 21st Century. One of the key indicators relevant for maternal mortality reduction is that of trained birth attendance, and making pregnancy safer remains an area of renewed focus in the Ninth Plan. Strategies that focus on family planning, safe motherhood and child survival will be stepped up.[48]

[47] National Health Survey Report 2000

[48] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

Many societies, according low status to women, accept a high incidence of maternal death as natural and inevitable. Bhutan does not fall in this category. As is known, maternal death is almost completely avoidable, from sepsis, hypertensive disorders, severe anaemia and haemorrhage [see Table 8.2, Annex B]. For many other nations, maternal death is the culmination of lifelong discrimination, including less nutrition, less health care and education. In Bhutan, maternal deaths are caused due to the rugged terrain, lack of communication facilities especially motorable roads and the scattered nature of the population.

As maternal death is still high in Bhutan, the Royal Government is committed to reduce this rate. Many fully equipped Emergency Obstritic Care Centres (EMOCs) are being set up in different parts of the country. Special focus has been given in developing appropriate human resources to improve maternal services. Ambulance strength has been increased in all the hospitals to facilitate rapid response for emergency and high-risk referral to the next higher level of care. Various choices of family planning services are made available. All hospitals and Basic Health Units run daily Mother and Child Health clinics [see Tables 8.3 and 8.4, Annex B]

Bhutan was the first country in the region to iodise its entire salt supply, which has resulted in the virtual elimination of iodine deficiency. Immunisation has been extended to 90% of the nation's children, and such deadly diseases as neonatal tetanus, polio and diphtheria have been almost eliminated, while malaria and leprosy are also under control.

In addition, the Royal Government has worked closely with monastic institutions and nunneries in the provision of health education for reproductive health. Because monks and nuns are held in high esteem, this makes them especially qualified to provide counseling and guidance with respect to emerging social problems, as well as support for vulnerable and disadvantaged groups.

Bhutan is probably one of the very few countries in the world where the traditional and modern health care systems are delivered in an integrated fashion with a very healthy cross referral system and an institutionalized consultative mechanism. Traditional Medicine has also opened up to women professionals, as a complementary option in all its branches. Today Bhutan has a Traditional Medicine Unit in each of its 20 Districts.

8.2 Raising Awareness and Protecting General Health

The reproductive health programme, including family planning and mother and child health, constitutes a substantive portion of the health sector allocation under the Ninth Plan. Preventative measures in maternal and child health management include an emphasis on education, which enables women to improve health and nutrition, reduce family size, overcome poverty, generate more income and increase their confidence, exerting a positive influence on the next generation.

Because many health problems are caused by lack of information and knowledge, especially regarding reproductive health and fertility control, one strategy adopted by the Royal Government in co-operation with international organisations has been to increase awareness and strengthen community involvement in all preventive aspects of health. Education materials addressing control of diarrhoeal diseases, acute respiratory infections, safe motherhood and reproductive health have been widely distributed.

The Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) identified the involvement of women village health workers in providing health services as a priority area of intervention. Available statistics show that although in a few districts women health workers exceed 60% of the total, as of late 1999, they constituted around 22% overall. Further improvements are anticipated.

In terms of law and legislation, other steps have been taken to protect health, particularly that of women. The National Assembly resolved in 1988 that all pregnant mothers and children should be immunised, with the mothers receiving tetanus toxoid.

In the area of general health, Bhutanese law bans alcohol consumption by minors under the age of 18, although that prohibition is frequently ignored and alcohol constitutes a very serious health problem for women and men alike – even young children – in some areas of the country. Alcohol consumption, in Bhutan as in other societies, has linkages to domestic violence and economic hardship, as well as places an additional burden on women trying to cope with family difficulties. Encouragingly, the cultivation, production, sale or consumption of narcotics such as marijuana, coca or opium is non-existent. As of 2002, 18 out of 20 districts have been declared Tobacco Free through grass roots initiative and youth mobilization.

Turning to the problem of HIV/AIDS, Bhutan today has 29 reported cases of HIV infection, of which 20 have been detected since 1999. More than one-third of the cases, a total of 11, are among civil servants. The Royal Government has initiated a vigorous HIV/AIDS prevention campaign that focuses on women as well as men, as per Article 12 of CEDAW. Screening of HIV and other sexually transmitted diseases through the Mother and Child Health programme and the public health laboratory has been a regular activity for several years; blood transfusions in all hospitals are done only after being screened for HIV. Promotion of condoms in all districts also has been a priority. Being in close proximity to a region with a high incidence of HIV/AIDS, Bhutan is definitely at risk. Monitoring and prevention of HIV/AIDS and other STDs is being strengthened during the Ninth Plan. Multisectoral Task Forces to address the rising concern of HIV/AIDS in the country.

With the rising number of sex workers inside Bhutan itself, found primarily in border towns, the Royal Government is increasingly facing a dilemma on how to deal with the sex trade and, in particular, its health implications. Many of these women reportedly come from neighboring areas. Clampdowns on the trade tend to drive sex workers underground, where they are not available for monitoring, treatment or counseling on HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. This, however, is vital because of the threats that the diseases pose that are directly or indirectly related to sex work.

In addition, many Bhutanese travel outside the country for business, study tours, continuing education and so forth and through engaging with sex workers there can transmit infections to wives and partners back home. This practice, coupled with the relaxed sexual norms within the country, has serious implications for the spread of STDs, especially with regard to women's increased vulnerability to infections of this nature. Prevalence of STDs in some parts of Bhutan is high.[49]

In this area the effort of Her Majesty Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuk, the Goodwill Ambassador of UNFPA is highly commendable. She has traveled throughout the country and to all military camps advocating prevention of HIV/AIDS and family planning.

[49] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

Overall, health coverage across the nation has been substantively expanded, particularly in the last decade. The Royal Government is further committed in improving the health status of the people of Bhutan. Important objectives during the Ninth Plan include:

- Enhancing the quality of health services;
- Targeting health services to reach the unreached;
- Strengthening the traditional medicine system and its integration with overall health services;
- Enhancing self-reliance and sustainability of health services;
- Intensifying human resource development for health and establishing a system of continuing education;
- Strengthening health management information systems and research and their use;
- Intensifying reproductive health services and sustaining population planning activities;
- Promoting community-based rehabilitation and mental health, and finding innovative means to enhance the well-being of people;
- Developing appropriate secondary and tertiary health care services, while maintaining the balance between primary, secondary and tertiary health care;
- Intensifying the prevention and control of prevailing health problems as well as emerging and re-emerging ones.

8.3 Nutritional Indicators for Women and Children

Poverty often results in malnutrition. Women and children are susceptible to malnutrition and are therefore a specific high-risk group in relation to health. Nutrition is an integral component of Bhutanese primary health care. The nutritional status of Bhutanese has improved over the years, more significantly for women and children because of an effective network of health care services, increased awareness in health care and growing economic prosperity. However, the overall nutritional status of the population still requires concerted effort from different sectors and agencies to target the probable causes of malnutrition like food shortages, infections, poor dietary habits and child care practices etc.

The Royal Government is paying special attention to problems related to nutrition. Several nutrition and micronutrient deficiency studies have been conducted over past decade. In 1999 the national anthropometric study was conducted, which included 3000 under five children from 30 randomly selected blocks. The results of the study indicate marked improvement in the nutritional status of the under five children as compared to the 1989 national nutrition survey.

Percentage of under five children who are underweight, stunted and wasted.

Year	1988	1999
Weight for age (under weight)	38	17
Height for age (Stunted)	56	40
Weight for height (wasted)	4.1	2.6

The prevalence of stunting is still high despite the fact that overall nutritional status of the children has improved. This may be an indication that still a considerable number of children are experiencing a long-term malnutrition, possibly related to infection, care and inadequate food both in terms of quality and quantity at the household level.

Of the children who participated in the 1999 anthropometric study, the male female ratio is 50:50. Descriptive analysis of the study did not indicate any significant variation between the two sexes.

Although regional variations were observed from the descriptive figure, particularly with 48 percent stunting in the east and 34 percent stunting in the west (stunting is a stable indicator for chronic malnutrition). It has to be noted the sampling for this study is based on thirty-cluster geog sampling and not on regions. In which case a comparison of the regional figures is not valid and reproducible.

Micronutrient deficiencies like of iodine deficiency disorder is on the verge of elimination. The 1996 IDD study "tracking progress towards sustainable elimination of IDD" revealed Total Goiter Rate (TGR) of 14%, Median Urinary Iodine level of 298 µ/L and iodated salt coverage of 82%. Periodic cyclic monitoring of the Iodine Deficiency Disorder Control Program (IDDCP) over the last four years also indicates that Bhutan has achieved the WHO goals for IDD elimination. However iron deficiency is still widely prevalent among the pregnant women. To address this situation, health departmental policy entails universal iron supplements to all pregnant women with 160 mg elemental iron per day during pregnancy and continues into lactation period. A nation wide anemia study has also been conducted in May 2002 and the data is under analysis. This study includes children 9 months to 36 months, mother and the father. The study is expected to give the first national figure on hemoglobin concentration in these three study groups to guide the program interventions for mother and children.

Clearly, one of the underlying factors affecting nutritional situation of communities is the general status of women. As noted previously, in Bhutan this is largely positive compared to other countries in the region. The relatively lower standards of nutritional status in the east may be associated with different dietary and eating habits as well as food availability and care practices of mother and child.

Following the results of the 1999 survey, the National Assembly adopted a resolution expressing concern for the nutritional well-being of all citizens. Special emphasis was given to the importance of nutrition in development.

Nutrition education approaches include the promotion of increased iron intake and improved iron bio-availability through better dietary practices. In addition, iron supplements are given to all pregnant and lactating women. Vitamin A supplements are given to lactating mothers, as well as all children under five along with de-worming tablets.

Nutrition surveys of the rural population show that calorie intakes are generally – though by no means universally – adequate, and that diarrhoea is common. Nutrition problems in under five children are may be related to the incident of diarrhoeal diseases, resulting from improper hygiene, sanitation and child feeding practices rather than dietary deficiencies. Child care practices and health service-seeking behaviours also have been cited as factors for poor nutrition in Bhutan. In 2002 the Royal Government of Bhutan launched the National Breast Feeding Policy which increase men's responsibility in child care by increasing the paternity leave from one day to 14 days and provides one hour flexible breast feeding time for lactating mothers.

In a 2001 national poverty assessment and analysis, 63 out of 224 responding *gewogs* and towns reported food insecurity.[50] During an earlier national food security assessment undertaken by the Royal Government and the Food and Agriculture Organization in 1993, food security profiles were developed for the

[50] Ibid.

18 districts that existed at the time (now 20). Sixteen food security indicators were used to determine food security ratings and to identify the most vulnerable districts.

The survey showed that there was a high incidence of chronic and transitory food insecurity in several parts of the country. Nine food-insecure districts were identified, virtually all in southern or eastern Bhutan. Lack of food security in southern Bhutan in particular has been attributed to climatic conditions there that make it difficult to successfully store grains and cereals for any length of time, as well as to pests consuming stored grains.

In other parts of the country, the incidence of chronic food insecurity appeared low, but transitory food insecurity was prevalent. It was estimated that daily calorie intake per capita in the nine districts identified as food insecure was 1,883 kilocalories, 26% below the national average. The calorie intake was determined to be significantly lower in four districts, three in the east and one in the far north.

A more recent survey[51] also indicated the continuing problem of food insecurity in Bhutan. In this analysis, which did not cover the south, much of the east, or remote districts of the north, 17% of respondents said they experienced some periods of food shortage. Nearly one-third of these were road workers.

8.4 Water and Sanitation

Turning to water and sanitation, there has been significant progress nationwide in the last decade [see Table 8.7, Annex B]. The percentage of the rural population with access to safe water supplies increased from 31% to 77.8% between 1987 and 2000. With respect to sanitation, 87% of the population has sanitary latrines.[52]

In CEDAW's provisions that address discrimination against rural women, the right to adequate living conditions such as sanitation, water supply, electricity and transportation is perhaps paramount. Access to safe water and safe sanitation are both expected to remain priority components in the Royal Government's approach to the rural population. These will prove especially important in tackling such problems as diarrhoea and skin infections, which figure prominently in the nation's morbidity profile and have been linked to the unsatisfactory hygiene situation still found in large parts of the nation.

Significant non-quantifiable outcomes of these programmes include not only qualitative improvements in the lives of the rural population and increased capacity of the planning, design and implementing staff, but also strengthened community participation in the management of facilities and the increased involvement of women. Because women are traditionally associated with fetching water in up to 80% of households, their involvement is critical to the success of piped water schemes. Women especially have been encouraged to undergo training as Village Water Caretakers, the focal points for these schemes.

Similarly, women in most rural and some urban households cook on open fires in poorly ventilated dwellings, and it has been noted that the smoke from traditional fuels contains numerous harmful elements likely to cause chronic lung disease and even cancer of the pharynx. Acute respiratory illnesses are very prevalent across the country. Experience elsewhere has shown that providing women with inexpensive stoves designed to use less fuel and minimise the amount of smoke can improve their health dramatically. Now, after

[51] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.

[52] Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001.

the installation of thousands of smokeless stoves in rural Bhutanese homes, such stoves are used by 22% of the population.[53]

The Ninth Plan objectives for water and sanitation, which have significant implications for women's health, include 100% access to safe drinking water and sanitation facilities by 2007.

8.5 Women and Reproductive Health

Until now, CEDAW has been the only international treaty whose provisions cover family planning. This is an area that is of critical concern to virtually every woman on Earth, and particularly in Bhutan, with its high population growth rate. Rapid growth in population limit social and economic development, severely reducing the likelihood that developing societies as a whole can move out of poverty or that women can contribute to development as the equals of men. In Bhutan, for example, population pressure has led to fragmentation of land holdings and an increase in the number of economically marginal farms.

The top priority given by the Royal Government to family planning issues has already been demonstrated, and the "Small Family, Happy Family" norm encouraged for every Bhutanese of reproductive age. Her Majesty the Queen, Ashi Sangay Choden Wangchuck, as the United Nations Population Fund Goodwill Ambassador has actively promoted reproductive health and family planning to rural women and wives of army personnel; she also has visited schools in all 20 districts and discussed reproductive health issues with adolescent students. His Majesty the King issued a Royal Decree in 1995 underscoring the importance of population planning in the context of population and sustainable development.

One survey found that nearly 100% of the women interviewed had knowledge of at least one modern method of family planning.[54] Among the currently married women, an average of 41% said they were using some form of contraception; the figures were 50% in urban areas, 30% in rural areas and 44% among road workers.

Even so, population databases and information systems still must be improved. Socio-demographic data have been collected on an ad hoc basis and limited in scope; virtually no data exist at district or local levels. Gaps are being narrowed in policy analysis and research at the national, regional and district levels.

Contraceptive prevalence was reported to be 30.7% in 2000, up from 18.8% in 1994, although in the latter year the prevalence was lowest among adolescent women at barely 1% [see Table 8.8, Annex B]. No age-specific data are currently available. Despite its continued emphasis on women's primary role in contraception, Bhutan is working to change that perception to ensure that all participate in family planning regardless of gender. Involvement of men in reproductive health is crucial for successful implementation of the programme, not only because men are significant partners of conjugal life, but also because they are an important audience for family planning and family life education. Male contraception particularly in permanent method is exceptionally high in Bhutan

One recent document, especially cognisant of the widely varying situations prevailing between women and men in different Bhutanese ethnic groups, states:[55] "Population education programmes must not be

[53] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

[54] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.

[55] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat, 1999.

confined to women of childbearing age, but increasingly extended to target males, who share – and sometimes dominate - in decisions on reproductive health and on methods of contraception."

Although men's participation in Bhutan's family planning programme is encouraging, they are still less likely to receive family planning counseling; moreover, because the prevalence of sexually transmitted diseases among males is reported to be high, this has enormous impacts on women's health as well.

Frequently, a gap exists between the number of children women say they want and the number they have; many women have births before they and their partners feel ready for a child. In Bhutan, the "ideal" number of children among different ethnic groups ranges from 2.4 to 5.5.

But perhaps the most alarming population statistic, widely acknowledged by the Royal Government, was that between 1984 and 1994 fertility rates actually increased among adolescents aged 15-19 and young women aged 20-24. Adolescents and youth (15-24), both male and female, constitute some 20% of the population. However, their knowledge on sex, and sexuality and reproductive health in general, is rudimentary despite their tendency toward early marriage and early pregnancy. In Bhutan, about one-third of births in a given year are attributed to women in the age group 15-24.[56] This is likely to have adverse consequences at both the individual and national levels. The Ninth Plan will continue its focus on reproductive health and family planning strategies.

8.6 Reducing High Population Growth

Even if fertility is reduced drastically to the replacement level of two surviving children per woman by the year 2012, as targeted, Bhutan's population is expected to continue to grow for 50 years.[57] This is attributed to population momentum resulting largely from the young age structure.

The Bhutanese economy, already under strain to provide for the existing population, will find it even more difficult to provide for a growing population. Indeed, the burden on the Royal Government's exchequer to meet the population's basic needs will be much heavier if the goal of achieving the replacement level of fertility is delayed even by five years, from the targeted 2012 to 2017.[58]

For its part, the Royal Government aims to achieve an ambitious 61% reduction in fertility in 15 years - to 2.10 in 2017 – in addition to achieving the replacement rate of two surviving children per woman by 2012. This reduction, it is projected, will make it possible to progressively reduce the overall rate of population growth to 1.3% by the year 2020, by which time the population is expected to number around 932,000.

At the same time, population policies will take special account of the perceptions existing at the household level in large parts of rural Bhutan – which are increasingly affected by labour shortages – that population growth does not constitute a problem. This not only arises from the traditional shortages that have existed but also from quickly rising rural-urban migration, primarily by men and young adults. Rapid depopulation of rural areas is not necessarily linked in the minds of rural households with population pressures that can only be understood at the national level. The Ninth Plan will be sensitive to population education and awareness programmes that are able to reach the household level.

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[56] Royal Government of Bhutan, Ministry of Planning, 1996.

[57] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat, 1999.

[58] Ibid.

8.7 Maternal and Child Health

Returning to the programme of maternal and child health, including family planning, it should be recalled that traditional beliefs and practices about diseases, death and birth determine health status and health-seeking behaviour, particularly in the case of women and children. Traditional belief is that deities, evil spirits or the dead cause illness. During pregnancy, most pregnant women visit religious or traditional healers for staying well and also sometimes for seeking advice on where and how the delivery should take place.

MCH/FP activities are being intensified within the scope of reproductive health, and national Safe Motherhood Guidelines have been developed. This programme is directed to strengthening health facilities and services so that women and men have access to safe, effective and acceptable methods of family planning and other methods of regulating fertility. It also aims to enable women to go safely through pregnancy and childbirth as well as have a healthy infant. In 2000, antenatal attendance at clinics was reported at 44,166 cases, with the average number of antenatal visits estimated at 2.4.[59]

Overall, 85% of births take place at home, most often under unhygienic conditions. Timely referral to a health facility providing essential obstetric services may be hampered by poor transportation and communications infrastructure. Particularly in southern Bhutan, some deliveries are overseen by "birth attendants," women from the community who perform the functions of a midwife and stay to help over the critical first few days. These women, whose role is generally passed from mother to daughter, may or may not have received training. Trained deliveries in 2000 accounted only for about 24% of all births, a number the Ninth Plan intends to increase.

Inevitably, the overwhelming number of deliveries unattended by professionally trained staff includes many that should have been detected as at risk. Particularly in villages, many pregnant women do not receive adequate rest; they continue to do demanding physical work late into their pregnancies and stop only when the labor of childbirth itself starts. Then they resume working in the fields or doing household chores almost immediately.

The Royal Government has developed and distributed "safe delivery kits" nationwide in an attempt to address the situation of highly prevalent home births. In addition, it targets pregnant women as well as children under its expanded programme of immunisation. Goals of Bhutan's MCH/FP programme include:

- Ensuring that 90% of pregnant women receive adequate antenatal and postnatal care;
- Ensuring that 90% of pregnant women have completed tetanus toxoid immunisation;
- Ensuring that more than 50% of normal deliveries are attended by trained personnel;
- Ensuring that pregnant women at high risk and all emergency cases receive skilled obstetric care;
- Providing universal access to family planning services;
- Increasing the rate of contraceptive prevalence.

8.8 Abortion

As in other nations, in Bhutan abortion remains perhaps the most sensitive and potentially divisive issue in the realm of women's reproductive rights. The tacit understanding that abortion is socially unacceptable and contrary to Buddhist respect for life has been passed down through generations.

[59] Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001.

In 1999 the Royal Government officially legalized medical termination of pregnancy, described as "the deliberate induction of abortion to save the woman from the risk of underlying disease and death, or when the fetus has been shown to have structural abnormalities that predispose to serious handicaps." Health personnel thus will accept medical termination of pregnancy if two recognized medical doctors certify that the pregnancy threatens the life of the mother or that the child will suffer severe physical and mental abnormalities. Bhutanese hospitals reported attending to 114 abortions in 2000, or 11.4% of cases with complications due to pregnancy.[60] No data indicate what proportion of these abortions was induced.

It appears that some Bhutanese women and even schoolgirls have sought abortions just across the border and elsewhere, although the quality and availability of abortion services offered by untrained doctors in these places have endangered lives. Post-abortion complications are treated at hospitals in Bhutan, although the capacity at district hospitals to deal with such cases is limited; these are not reported to authorities, however, to protect patient confidentiality.[61]

It should again be noted that there have been no reports of infanticide in Bhutan because of the lack of gender preferences among children [see Table 8.9, Annex B]. Similarly, it appears that such abortions as do occur are unrelated to learning the sex of the child is female.

8.9 Conclusion

As the Royal Government further develops reproductive health and population policies, the focus will be on:

- Adolescent reproductive health care;
- Safe motherhood and child survival;
- Family planning;
- HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases;
- Prevention and management of complications of abortions;
- Infertility;
- Cancers of the breast and reproductive tract, particularly cervical cancer;
- Problems of elderly women, such as osteoporosis and aging;
- Other problems related to women's health.

It is evident that many challenges remain in the area of health. The Royal Government is committed to continuing improvements in health at a rapid pace during the Ninth Plan and beyond. In terms of priority areas in health milestones for the future, the following have been identified:[62]

- Reduce infant mortality rate to current average for all developing countries by 2007, end of Ninth Plan;
- Reduce maternal mortality rate to current average for all developing countries by 2007;
- Reduce under-5 mortality rate to current average for all developing countries by 2007;
- Achieve the current average of doctor/population for all developing countries by 2007;

[60] Royal Government of Bhutan. Ministry of Health and Education, Department of Health Services, 2001.

[61] Kinga, 1999.

[62] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat, 1999.

- Increase life expectancy to the current average for all developed countries by 2012, end of Tenth Five Year Plan;

Clearly, Bhutan will continue to focus on the health of women as well as men for many years to come.

9. Women and Employment (CEDAW, Article 11)

The right to work is recognised as a human right under CEDAW. This includes the concept of equal pay for equal work, which is enshrined in Bhutanese civil service regulations if not in law itself, except at the level of unskilled labour.

Women's participation in the labour force, particularly in the modern sector of the economy, remains modest. Lower levels of education and skill enhancement result in women being "less employable," particularly in urban centers.[63] About 23% of civil servants are women, and the number of women holding senior management positions (i.e., administrative and managerial) is comparatively small. Female membership in the National Assembly, district development committees and block development committees, although improving in recent years, is still inadequate. For instance during the year 2000 to 2002, out of the total recruitment of persons by the Department of Employment and Labour in the corporations and the private organisations, 25% constituted women canadidates.

The majority of the women's labour force today is still involved in agriculture. In 1984, the last year for which there has been a full accounting of the percentage of population according to economic activity by age and sex, 95% of women aged 15 to 64 were in the agriculture sector, with 3.6% listed as having no occupation [see Table 9.1, Annex B]. A more recent limited study,[64] in examining women's involvement in agriculture, placed 49% as working on a family farm, with the remainder of the breakdown as follows: 28% as manual labourers, 1% as sharecroppers and 5% working for someone else for a regular paid salary, with 17% engaged in other activities, including cow herding and shopkeeping.

However, there are indications that women have lesser access to and participation in agricultural and animal husbandry training programs particularly when participation in these programs require travel and over-night stays. Attention will also be focused on improving women's access to information on enterprise development.[65]

Meanwhile, statistics from urban areas indicate that 47.2% of women in Thimphu, the capital, and 45.8% of those in Phuentsholing, the second-largest city, are employed, whether in agriculture, non-agricultural business or cottage activities. A total of 27.7% of women in Thimphu are paid or unpaid employees in a non-agricultural business – a figure contributed to by Government service – with only 12.7% in Phuentsholing in the same category. The most recent figures indicate 45.5% of all employed Bhutanese, rural and urban, are women.[66]

[63] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.
[64] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.
[65] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.
[66] Royal Government of Bhutan, CSO, 2001.

Although some urban women are now prominent as the heads of successful businesses, in all sectors of paid employment, public or private, men significantly outnumber women. In addition, women remain concentrated in low-skilled and low-paid jobs with often limited promotion prospects. With non-salaried employment, a striking visible economic reality is women's growing participation in the informal sector. In the analysis of urban employment patterns mentioned above, a significant 13.6% of women in Thimphu participated in cottage activities, while 4.8% were self-employed in non-agricultural businesses; the figures for Phuentsholing were 17.9% in cottage activities, with no figures available for self-employed in non-agricultural businesses. Lacking adequate education or marketable skills, many of these women depend on micro enterprises or domestic services, as well as retail trades such as selling locally produced alcohol or weaving for profit.

It is estimated that about 50,000 students will enter the labour market in the Ninth Plan, which will increase to 100,000 by 2010. In addition, about 19,000 economically active rural persons expected to migrate to urban centers seeking employment by the end of the Plan. Thus, about 70,000 jobs will need to be created outside farming by the end of the Ninth Plan, or about 14,000 jobs each year. One of the daunting challenges that the country faces is not only the creation of adequate gainful employment opportunities for the exponentially increasing Bhutanese workforce, but also ensuring that women have an equal chance to avail of those opportunities. During the Ninth Plan, favourable employment conditions will be formulated to enable women to pursue careers and raise children.[67]

In addition, it is noteworthy that the Department of Employment and Labour has initiated a process of broad consultations among employer and employee groups, as well as with government agencies concerning the shape and format of a national labour policy and legislation. The policy is expected to address many important employment issues including those of direct relevance to women in the workplace.

9.1 Women in Public Service

Although Bhutan has made no formal commitment to the right to employment for women, or for equal pay for equal work, Royal Civil Service Commission regulations – widely regarded as the standard for many private enterprises as well – are gender-neutral regarding pay.

As in many places, the regulations affirm the principle of equality in hiring, training, promotions and benefits, although they include no penalties for violation. In the private sector, occasional gender-specific job advertising and hiring is encountered. No court cases apparently have ever been filed by women regarding alleged infringement of their right to work.

Until the modern era began in the 1960s, Government service in Bhutan was characterised by tremendous hardship, given the total absence of communications infrastructure. Pioneer students, whose limited numbers were almost exclusively male, filled the many vacant and important positions available, including those of administrators. However, a modern administrative machinery needed not only a great deal more people but also proved that it need not be a gender-specific profession. Hence, women began to fill public positions. Today, after more than 40 years of modernisation, Bhutan has built up a compact civil service of 14,484, of which over 23% are women, a figure that is still low but rising; most, however, are in the lower grades. While there are no women in the Royal Bhutan Army, 104 women have joined the Royal Bhutan Police in recent years.

[67] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

New initiatives taken by Their Majesties the Queens and other female members of the Royal Family to serve the Government, particularly in leading social service activities, also provide positive female role models and lend encouragement for girls and women to participate in public service.

9.2 Rural-Urban Migration, Underage Girls as Domestic Workers, and Day Care

With the emergence of rapidly increasing rural-urban migration, primarily but not always by men, attention is turning to creation of productive employment for both genders. Those who migrate to urban centres in Bhutan, as elsewhere, will do so for a variety of reasons, with one of the main ones being the expectation that they will be able to find work that is less laborious and more rewarding than can be found in rural areas.

Given current patterns of job creation, however, many may be faced with disappointment. A combination of factors is conducive to the rapid formation of urban squatter settlements – a phenomenon so far little known in Bhutan – with a potentially wide range of negative impacts that include social and environmental problems.

However, rural-urban migration also may have positive effects, reducing the population pressures in rural areas on available agricultural land. Migration may slow or even reverse the trends toward smaller plots and the fragmentation of land holdings, thereby helping to defuse the forces that give rise to landlessness and sharecropping arrangements, both of which are beginning to be found in some parts of the nation.

Among girls and women, many of those who do migrate to urban areas find themselves employed as domestic help for the urban elite, particularly in child care. Most of the younger girls engaged in this work are not in school, thus further limiting the development of their full potential. This situation is sometimes difficult for all involved, although by and large it appears that domestic workers are not abused in Bhutan as they are in many other countries.

The employment of child labour has arisen in part by the provisions relating to maternity leave, which by nature must be limited; while not mandated by law, three months of paid maternity leave for each of three pregnancies is allowed by civil service rules. After that, women can take similar leave of three months for three more pregnancies, but without pay. This is intended as an incentive for couples to adopt the "small family, happy family" norm. Maternity leave, with full pay, also is admissible in case of miscarriage for a maximum of four weeks. In private organisations, maternity leave tends to be shorter than in the civil service, sometimes as little as 6 weeks.

At the same time, some women and men argue that the one-day paternity leave in the civil service and two days in most private organisations needs to be drastically increased, to between two weeks and a month. Because urban families do not enjoy the traditional support system of the joint family, urban parents feel great pressure of limited leaves from work. Maximising parental leave schemes for fathers may represent a large step forward in promoting men's opportunities for taking part in the care of their children.

Meanwhile, the lack of institutionalised child day care facilities in urban areas, Government as well as private, is increasingly forcing working mothers and fathers to entrust their children to extended family members or baby sitters. Sometimes, if suitable help cannot be found, the mother cannot consider employment

outside the home. Child day care for single parents in urban areas, who are mostly impoverished women, is even more difficult. The Ninth Plan will encourage establishment of child care centres and nurseries.[68]

9.3 Pay for Unskilled Labour

Regarding unskilled labour, there is officially no wage difference between women and men. The national wage rate for workers is fixed irrespective of gender. In addition, the 1994 regulations for the wage rate also state that labour recruiting agencies may recruit only men or women aged 18 to 56, protecting both minors – girls and boys alike – and older persons.

The practice in the informal sector can vary widely in different areas of the country, according to one limited study.[69] Cash payment for farm work is not a preferred option, whereas labour exchange and payment of wages in kind are very popular. In eastern Bhutan and many parts of western Bhutan, a day's work of a woman is equal to a day's work of a man. Skill also is valued and paid more. However, in some areas there can be differences in wage although the difference is at times negligible, amounting to less than one-fourth of a U.S. dollar per day, but many women feel that it is unfair. Men argue that they put in more labour, carry heavier loads and expend more strength and therefore should receive comparatively higher wages.

During the Ninth Plan, objectives and strategies for human resources management and development include the following, most of which assume equality of women and men already has been achieved:

- Upgrading qualifications and professional competencies of civil servants through systematic training;
- Developing a core mass of professionals in strategic sectors;
- Facilitating the growth of the private sector through an appropriate human resources development policy and necessary support;
- Developing human resource capabilities at *geog* [block] level for *geog*-based development;
- Developing human resources capacity of sectors by recruiting and providing the required number of qualified people.

10. Sharing of Power and Decision-Making (CEDAW, Article 7)

Exclusion of women from political participation on a global scale is rooted in history as well as in economic and legal realities. But when women do participate in governance, many of the ways in which they change it are evident in the issues they choose to tackle: In many nations, this has included water, alcohol abuse, education, health and domestic violence.[70] Women also express different values and appear to particularly value proximity, whether it be to a drinking water source, a health center, a court of justice or an office of administration.

In Bhutan, policies vis-à-vis women are designed to enable them to participate in the formulation and implementation of overall Royal Government policies and programmes. However, there remains scope for improvement in Bhutanese women's participation as an active force in the political life of the country. The increased involvement of women in development efforts, as decision-

[68] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.
[69] Kinga, 1999.
[70] United Nations Development Programme, Monograph Series #5, 1996.

makers and representatives of the people at the grassroots level, is receiving a top priority within the Royal Government under its overarching goal of decentralisation and active participation of all citizens.

Although the patriarchal value system found in southern Bhutan may particularly discourage women's presence in the public arena, with strong cultural inhibitions against discussing issues in public with men, this is generally not the case in northern Bhutan. Even so, many Bhutanese women, especially young women, remain reticent to speak in public, although it is common for them to discuss issues informally with their husbands or male relatives in private.

10.1 Women in Community, Block and District Decision-Making

Women are very much underrepresented in block and district development committees, as well as in central Government. Local public offices such as *gup*, *chimi*, *mangap*, *tshogpa* and *chipoen* are all usually occupied by men. The latter is the lowest order of ranking; the office requires conveying public messages and announcements to the community, collecting contributions for local festivals and rituals, and informing people of dates of community meetings. In the *chipoen*'s absence, his wife might shoulder his responsibility; however, the wives of other office bearers would never substitute for the husband. Public offices also are considered physically demanding, requiring frequent movements between places, and rural women have been discouraged from covering such distances.

Women do participate, however, in the election of *gups* (village heads) and *chimis* (representatives to the National Assembly). They also attend the public village meetings known as *zomdus*, sometimes representing up to 70% of the participants. Some argue that public meetings are attended mostly by women because they are usually at home, whereas husbands are away in the fields, in urban areas or elsewhere.

Although decisions concerning the community regarding water supply schemes, school and Basic Health Unit construction and other issues are taken in these meetings, matters of national importance must be routed through the Block Development Committees (GYTs) and District Development Committees (DYTs), and finally, the National Assembly. The sex composition of the decision-makers at these levels thus is also important. Following the adoption of new statutes in 2002, GYT members are to be elected based on the votes of the population above the age of 21 and not on household votes. As noted above, women's representation in the Block and District Development Committees is not satisfactory. The following are examples from eastern and southern Bhutan cited in one limited study:[71]

District	DYT		Block	GYT	
	Male	Female		Male	Female
Mongar	41	3			
Tsirang	50	0	Shemjong	10	0
Lhuentse	26	0	Jaray	23	0
Pemagatshel	21	2	Shumar	3	2
Trashi Yangtse	24	0	Bumdiling	24	0

[71] Kinga, 1999.

Women did recognise the value of meetings at the higher levels but found extensive travel and night halts as major constraints for attending block- and district-level meetings. In addition, the burden of household and farm work, coupled with long and inflexible hours of both public and political work, prevented women from being more active. Many women say they perceive that important governance decisions are better made by men and feel that "women are not taken so seriously." Despite positive indicators, therefore, many women in Bhutan do believe in the superiority of men and feel that men are better equipped to understand and participate in matters of governance.[72]

The inability to read and write, "to speak, understand and listen," was considered paramount in women's limited public participation thus far, because women generally have had less access to information and to fewer opportunities for travel and for experiencing life outside of their communities. While differential needs may be expressed at village meetings, there is insufficient focus on strategic gender interests at the district level and higher.[73] Important opportunities thus exist for improving women's access to information and education so that their needs and views remain part of local and national development.

Encouragingly, however, 14 of 99 *chimis*, or elected representatives of the people to the National Assembly, during the 2001 session were women. One of the six Royal Advisory Councillors also is female. Many men welcomed the increasing number of women members in the National Assembly. No seats are specifically reserved for women, who were first nominated to the Assembly in the 1980s. To encourage greater participation by women, a 1998 Royal Decree underscored the importance of women's representation in the Assembly.

10.2 Women's Representation in Government and Diplomatic Forums (CEDAW Article 8)

The Royal Government continues to promote wider representation and participation of women in broader decision-making bodies as well as the civil service. The situation is already improving with the increase of enrolment of girls in the higher secondary levels. No women are yet reported in Grade 1 of the civil service, with 29 men and 1 woman in Grade 2 and 56 men and 2 women in Grade 3. Within the judicial system, there are two woman lawyers and about a dozen women training as law students.

As for women's representation in diplomatic forums, as noted by Article 8 of CEDAW, female representation again is less than male, perhaps because of the low percentage of women in Government overall. Women comprise 10 of 40 officers in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Bhutan has no women ambassadors, although women civil servants occasionally lead Government delegations representing the country. Moreover, Their Majesties the Queens have become very actively engaged in representing Bhutan at international and regional symposiums on youth issues, reproductive health, sexually transmitted diseases and HIV/AIDS, as well as other issues, providing excellent role models for girls and women. Although Bhutan has adopted no specific legislative measures, it supports ensuring women the opportunity to represent the country at the international level and to participate in the work of international organisations.

[72] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.

[73] Ibid.

11. Women's Access to Economic Structures and the Productive Process, Including the Right to Bank Loans and Other Forms of Credit (CEDAW, Articles 13/14/15)

Addressing discrimination against women in economic as well as social and cultural life, CEDAW emphasises the right of women to have access to land ownership, bank loans and other forms of family credit, legal contracts and so forth. In Bhutan, women's rights in these areas are largely unimpeded but may vary between ethnic groups.

In the area of inheritance, the law reserves equal rights for all children, irrespective of sex and age. In practice, however, traditional systems operate which are informal, flexible and often circumstantial. Daughters tend to inherit the land in much of northern and parts of eastern Bhutan, although in the south and other areas of the east it is a patrilineal system [see also Section 4.4]. Where daughters are the inheritors, sons generally move in with their brides' families. Variations in inheritance can occur even between villages in the same district, however; if parents doubt the capability of the eldest child, for example, the most capable child will be identified as the inheritor. On the other hand, the attitude among some parents is that they are inclined to give extra help to the less capable of their children. A woman's access to land ownership, and credit for that matter, is not restricted if she marries a non-national.

But even in this situation, the relative distribution of human resources, which is so crucial in rural Bhutan, can come into play. In a typical northern Bhutanese farming community, a brother or a sister of a large family, when establishing marital bonds with a person of a family with greater land holdings but short on human resources, will move to live with them and will not ask, nor receive, a share from his or her family. The economic sense is obvious: The bride or bridegroom who moves into the home of the spouse enhance the productivity of the household he or she adopts and simultaneously improves the resource situation of the home left behind.

11.1 Debate Over Women's Inheritance

Although there are many positive aspects to women's inheritance, including protection for their economic independence, the tradition is causing increased debate among some Bhutanese. Because many Bhutanese women feel tied to the land that they have inherited and feel strongly that their daughters also should inherit it, this custom may be preventing some girls from gaining even a minimal amount of education.

It has been seen in other countries that the daughters, who are often considered economic liabilities, still provide household and workplace labour so valuable that many families feel they cannot spare them for the education that would drastically improve their economic and social status. In one limited study,[74] nearly all Bhutanese women interviewed had begun working as children.

Bhutanese and international participants in a 1993 gender workshop listed the traditional system of daughters' inheritance at the top of "what should be changed" about Bhutanese society to further favour women's rights. Again, the encouragement of a higher enrolment of girls in school was cited. This remains a major challenge.

[74] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.

11.2 Women's Access to Credit

When development began, Bhutanese women were far behind men in venturing into the modern sector; despite the limitations still found today, they are slowly being able to come forward. The Eighth Five Year Plan (1997-2002) stated: "Female participation in gainful activities is also considered one of the important measures to enhance women's social status and to curtail fertility. There is evidence to suggest that access to resources, particularly credit facilities, empowers rural women by strengthening their economic roles, and this leads to higher use of contraception. Strategies [will] therefore be worked out to empower women through vocational and skills training, income generation and credit facilities in rural areas."

Initiatives boosted by the National Women's Association of Bhutan and the Bhutan Development Finance Corp., a lending agency that operates credit programmes for commercial farming, "rural upliftment" and industrial development, have served the interests of a significant number of women.

The BDFC, which opened for business in 1988, is the most important of the financial institutions in meeting the credit needs of the rural community. With its network of branch offices in all 20 districts, the BDFC provides credit services to both women and men. In 2001 they comprised 35% of the total clients, which numbered more than 11,000. An increasing number of rural women are planning and implementing household schemes to better their economic status, while many women in urban centres are beginning to set up small businesses.

In order to enhance credit accessibility and delivery, BDFC decentralised its credit system with the establishment of block loan committees and introduced schemes such as savings mobilisation and group guarantee lending. These measures also have brought about wider participation by the rural population, especially women.

A review of credit patterns still indicate the dominant role of men in taking investment decisions, however. Overall more men than women take loans. In addition, women may not necessarily be involved in financial decision-making processes, a trend counter to the usual norm of joint decision making within the household.[75] This will be studied further. Another, limited study[76] surveyed indicators on women's participation in financial decision making and found the following: 27% of women said they were solely involved in decisions about obtaining monetary credit, while 14% said they make decisions jointly with their husbands. The remaining 59% said the men made decisions on their own.

11.3 Women and Poverty

The economic factors discussed in this section have important implications for women's poverty in Bhutan as elsewhere. In general, poverty and discrimination undermine women's ability to contribute to and take full advantage of social and economic progress, in the workplace and within the family. The majority of women worldwide experience poverty at multiple and complex levels in the form of economic dependency, *powerlessness in the family and low social status. Given the multifaceted nature of women's impoverishment,* the responses must be equally multidimensional and sectoral.

[75] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.

[76] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.

Poverty and gender subordination can produce a vicious circle for women. Because many women are overworked, they seek the help of their daughters. This deprives the girls of schooling and they are therefore handicapped in relation to vocational and other types of training and income-generating activities. This, in turn, leads to increased poverty.

Although the extreme and grueling poverty that characterises so many developing nations has largely bypassed Bhutan, that is not to say that the country lacks any of the problems that can contribute to poverty. From qualitative surveys conducted across the country among respondents who considered themselves poor, as well as a recent urban poverty study, one or more of the following were considered distinguishing features of poverty: lack or inadequate size of land holdings; inability to own a decent house; vulnerability to food shortages; and lack of sufficient resources to send children to school.[77] In urban areas, a major cause of poverty is the high level of unemployment and underemployment. Opportunities for employment are limited for both men and women; however, these opportunities are generally much lower for women.

In wide areas of rural Bhutan, the lack of food security, also discussed in Section 8.3, presents a critical challenge to families. Poverty further exacerbates intra-household inequalities. Rural women are faced with long working days; in addition to productive activities, they must perform numerous arduous tasks such as fetching water and fuel, grinding cereals, preparing food, maintaining the house and taking care of children. Nationwide, child mortality and morbidity remain high.

From a traditional perspective, poverty and underdevelopment are defined in terms of the persistence of ignorance. Many of the priorities now advocated by international development institutions, such as human development, environmental conservation, self-reliance, decentralisation, participation and empowerment, are not new for Bhutan. Although the Royal Government has not always referred to these priorities in the terminology favoured today, they have for decades been essential components of the distinctively Bhutanese approach to development.[78]

12. Violence Against Women

Women globally continue to be the target of physical and psychological violence on a scale not known to any other group. Violence against women reflects the power relations between men and women in all societies. Most women and their families, in Bhutan as elsewhere, will not report rape and even less to wife beating, resulting in a culture of silence.

Gender-based violence is often fatal: More than half of all murders of women around the world are committed by present or former partners. Suicide by women often is associated with other forms of violence against them. Violence also encompasses life-threatening deprivation of resources; unlike in most ethnic communities of Bhutan, girls in many developing countries receive less nourishment and suffer from malnutrition at higher rates than boys, as well as have educational opportunities widely denied.

Stopping violence against women and girls is not just a matter of punishing individual acts. The issue is changing the perception – so deep-seated that it is often unconscious – that women are fundamentally of less

[77] Royal Government of Bhutan, 2002.

[78] Royal Government of Bhutan, Planning Commission Secretariat, 1999.

value than men. In Bhutan, steps are beginning to get under way to sensitise police, judges, doctors, teachers, mass media and political leaders alike to domestic and sexual violence through education and awareness training, in order to make intervention more effective. Among key issues are the positive duty of police to protect women from domestic violence; to prevent re-victimisation; to treat domestic violence – including sexual abuse – as a crime, not simply a "family matter;" and to follow up appropriately on domestic violence cases.

In the context of CEDAW, its obligation of States Parties that ratify the Convention to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organisation or enterprise is particularly notable in the area of violence against women, including domestic and sexual violence, and the sexual abuse of the girl child. This is a major achievement because, as we have seen, international human rights treaties are usually limited to the conduct of the state or agencies, adhering to the international legal principle of state responsibility.

The Royal Government is committed to placing such responsibility in the private sphere not only in the context of CEDAW but also in concert with the Vienna Declaration of 1983, the United Nations General Assembly Declaration Against Violence Against Women, the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development, and the Platform for Action adopted by the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women.

12.1 Reporting of Violence Against Women

Many Bhutanese women concede that marital violence among friends and relatives occurs, particularly because of jealousy and the influence of alcohol, although the frequency of quarrels and physical abuse may vary.[79] In addition, because marital violence is identified only with physical battery, psychological and sexual abuses are excluded. Victims usually refer their cases to formal institutions such as courts only after repeated violence is committed against them. Generally, it appears that financially independent working women sue for divorce, whereas non-working mothers dependent on their husbands for livelihood prefer to endure the harassment.[80] According to the same source, Bhutanese society "admits a certain degree of quarreling and violence between husband and wife arising out of various petty reasons."

Crime statistics worldwide usually grossly underreport violence against women, particularly battery and sexual assault within the family. In Bhutan, there is similar scope for improvement. "Details of crime against the human body" has no sub-category for domestic violence beyond the very broad one of "assault." Thus, no specific statistics are available regarding those domestic violence cases that may be reported. (No cases have been reported since 1996 in "trafficking in fair sex;" see Table 12.1, Annex B.

Meanwhile, data in 2000 showed a sharp increase in reporting of all sexual offences, which include rape, attempted rape, adultery, incest, molestation, elopement and dacoity cum rape [see Table 12.2, Annex B].

Although Bhutan lacks laws specifically relating to domestic violence and sexual harassment, such crimes are covered under the general provisions *Kadyon Ka* 2 and *Na* 1-1 (a) and (b) of the *Thrimzhung Chhenpo*, both of which are designed to address "ambiguous" sections of the law. Rape was made a criminal offense in Bhutan in 1953. Under laws amended by the National Assembly in 1996, it was removed from the Marriage Act and formulated into a separate Rape Act, reflecting much more serious punishment, especially

[79] Royal Government of Bhutan et al., 2001.
[80] Kinga, 1999.

when minors are involved. Offenders now must serve prison sentences in addition to paying financial compensation to the victim. The amounts of compensation and sentence differ depending on the degree of the crime committed; details are noted in Section 4.2.

12.2 Violence Against Women During Civil Disorder

Women are particularly vulnerable to sexual abuse in the context of war and state militarism and in a range of other political, social and cultural upheavals. Worldwide, there is a growing incidence of seemingly random, but often very systematic, acts of violence directed at women in situations of civil, political or economic turmoil, or during international and civil warfare; these are not included under the international definition of torture.

Although northern and eastern Bhutan have been largely spared such turmoil, this has not been the case in southern Bhutan for the last 10 years following cross-border raids by dissidents. According to national media reports over the years, numerous women have been sexually assaulted during the course of these terrorist raids.

12.3 Sexual Abuse and Sexual Harassment

A legitimate concern seems to exist over sexual abuse of girls and young women who are sent away to schools that are a great distance from their families. More attention must also be focused on reports that sexual harassment in offices of women at the support-services level exists. Likewise, in rural areas many people say they perceive the need to provide dancing girls to entertain in villages as a form of harassment.[81] An increasing trend among young rural women is the tendency to escape the hardship associated with farm labour through marriages, often very short-lived, with civil servants and others who have other means of income, such as teachers, or with those perceived to have a more secure future, such as male students at the college level; in many cases, this has generated a serious problem among these girls.

Village girls and young women also continue to be aware of the persistent traditional practice of "night hunting," where young men enter village houses at night to have sex with young women; anecdotal evidence indicates that many girls and their families are fearful of this tradition, although frequently the "hunting" is consensual and has been arranged in advance.

Two-thirds of the nine women representatives in the National Assembly who were interviewed for a recent limited study[82] said that sexual abuse and alcoholism were the two largest problems reported to them by their constituents.

It is important that Bhutanese women and girls themselves understand their rights to say no to sex, to not have to endure beatings or unwanted advances, to not be subjected to violence in any form, physical or psychological, and to know where to go to seek help and support in these kinds of situations. This can only be achieved through a strong awareness program, led by the Royal Government and disseminated through the media and other forums, that is directed at women as well as men. Further attention will be devoted to providing support services for those who are victims of sexual aggression or abuse, and services will be established ensuring confidentiality and professional support and intervention.

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[81] Ibid.

[82] Currie-Namgyal, 1999.

13. Creating Awareness

In order to achieve gender equity, CEDAW calls upon Governments to work toward transforming not only law but culture. All practises that harm women, no matter how deeply imbedded in culture, must be eradicated. Dissemination of information and creating awareness is a critical part of this process.

Bhutan continues to reinforce positive developments to motivate and create awareness of women's rights among its citizens in areas including family planning, gender mainstreaming and gender sensitisation, although more remains to be done. There is still limitted awareness creation in the broadcast or print media. In co-sponsoring a 2001 baseline gender study with United Nations organisations, however, the Government was able to strengthen awareness on a variety of gender issues. Meanwhile, the need for gender awareness training, for civil servants and others, may be considered for motivating greater understanding of women's rights.

Awareness building about women's situation, discrimination, and rights and opportunities is a very large step toward gender equality. Collective awareness building provides a sense of group identity and the power of working as a group, feelings that can be enhanced among women in Bhutan. Empowerment is a process of awareness and capacity building, leading to greater participation, to greater decision-making power and control and, ultimately, to transformative action.

14. Conclusion

Compared to other women in developing nations, the majority of women in Bhutan enjoy a high degree of freedom and rights and to partake in most spheres of development. Extreme inequalities and overt gender discrimination generally do not prevail in northern Bhutanese life, although gender biases inherited from hundreds of years of belief and tradition persist. However, in southern Bhutan, which is more influenced strongly by different customs, women tend to be more restricted and to experience numerous constraints in a male-dominated social value system.

In general, however, as the traditional social structure based on the joint family system becomes more nucleated and urban in orientation, a new social class constituting the educated and professionals is emerging. Slowly, but with increasing vigor, a shift is occurring in the emphasis of value from the physical to the intellectual. This is beginning to undermine certain gender biases, which, although largely subtle, have derived much of their strength from rural agrarian and pastoral lifestyles where masculine stamina was paramount.[83]

The Royal Government is making all efforts to institute necessary changes to eradicate remaining gender gaps and shortcomings that exist, particularly in education/literacy, employment an public decision-making. Since CEDAW came into force in the country in 1981, a number of initiatives, particularly in the legal, educational and health spheres, were initiated to promote the rights and interests of women.

The connection between CEDAW advocacy and changes to national legislation, meanwhile, often cannot be established clearly. Many important laws for women worldwide have been passed following CEDAW ratification, women's NGOs have frequently used the Convention as a component of their campaigns to push for these laws, and Governments may rely on these laws at CEDAW Committee sessions as proof that

[83] Kinga, 1999.

they are fulfilling their obligations under the Convention. But there is really no way to show just what was determinative in the passage of any given law. Furthermore, as the Convention increasingly becomes an integral part of a nation's rights culture, as it largely has in much of Bhutan, its contribution becomes harder to isolate and identify.

14.1 Constraints to Implementation of CEDAW

Like most nations, Bhutan has experienced various constraints in its implementation of CEDAW and its progress toward gender equality. Not least of these is the significant lack of human resources because of the country's relatively small population and its late start to development. Examining the lack of technical expertise, for example, we find that there are basically no psychological, counseling or therapy services available for victims of abuse, family members engaged in such actions and professional guidance for further prevention and behavioural changes. The human resources dilemma stands in sharp contrast to the experience of most developing nations, which are heavily overpopulated already. Indeed, the fairly recent introduction of modern education in Bhutan has not yet been able to overcome the shortage of human power with the necessary skills for a developing economy.

Other constraints include Bhutan's geographic isolation; its limited land suitable for agricultural production, which restricts the potential for increasing output from the agricultural sector and increases the risks of environmental degradation; the remoteness and sparse distribution of much of the population; the low level of monetisation, which has restricted the Royal Government's ability to raise domestic revenues; the difficult provision of roads and communications networks; and the high cost of delivery of health and education services.

Bureaucratic constraints, meanwhile, include lack of resources and equipment in some institutions dedicated to issues of central concern to women; lack of formal definition of some issues of immediate concern to women, such as domestic violence, as issues of human rights; and need for strengthening monitoring and evaluation systems for some development programmes.

14.2 Bhutan's Achievements With Regard to Women

Despite the constraints mentioned above, Bhutan has repeatedly demonstrated its commitment to the development of women and their empowerment. The country's overall approach to the goal of gender equality, include but are not limited to the following:

- A traditional respect for all life, with an emphasis on the principles of tolerance and respect, which translates into a high status for most women;
- An explicit priority given to the policy of Gross National Happiness, which stresses individual human development, regardless of gender, over national economic gains;
- In general, gender equality before the law;
- Relative sharing of productive work and joint household decisions, particularly in rural areas;
- Mainstreaming of a gender perspective in all Royal Government policies, offering a platform for demonstrating best practises elsewhere in the region;
- Equal value for girl and boy child
- Favourable opportunities for inheritance of property by women

- Lack of an atmosphere of fear and intimidation between genders, with relative autonomy for many women;
- A strong commitment to the goals of Health for All and Education for All;
- Very significant reductions in infant, under-5 and maternal mortality rates in only a decade, although total numbers remain high;
- Initiation of widespread gender-sensitive programmes in nutrition and maternal health;
- Specific prioritisation of women's health, in particular reproductive health, in the nation's programmes and policies;
- Significant improvements in water and sanitation nationwide, which have critical implications for both women's health and labour;
- Establishment of community schools to promote higher enrollment of girls;
- Vigorous promotion of non-formal education programmes.

These accomplishments are areas in which the country takes great pride and is committed to sustain and develop further in the future.

14.3 Remaining Areas for Consideration and Action

The Royal Government is committed to ensure that gender equality remains a priority. It is further committed to examine areas that may require further scrutiny, such as the following:

- Formulating a national definition of discrimination against women congruent with CEDAW;
- Formulating legislation expressly prohibiting discrimination against women, including unintentional and/or indirect discrimination, given that gender discrimination is a multifaceted phenomenon;
- Establishing an effective national machinery as a catalyst for action on the implementation of gender related issues;
- Ensuring that the commitment to mainstreaming a gender perspective in national policies is not misconstrued simply because women are welcome to participate in all programmes;
- Formulating clear and measurable results and indicators for gender issues in specific sectors and programmes;
- Formally enshrining the overall concept of equal pay for equal work in law, with specific penalties for violation;
- Generating and compiling much more comprehensive gender-disaggregated data, at the national, district, block and household levels;
- Ensuring that women are able to take advantage of technological advances and economic growth;
- Continuing to address gender inequalities in school enrolment as well as functional literacy, and developing and implementing a formal reproductive health/sex education curriculum in the schools;
- Initiating a new and strong focus on domestic violence as a pervasive human rights issue, including implementation of specific laws and the education of women, their spouses and partners, police, judicial personnel and others on negative implications of tolerance;
- Initiating a new and strong focus on eradication of sexual abuse and sexual harassment of women and girls, particularly in the workplace, at school and in rural social life;
- Even more actively advocating gender equality and the empowerment of women, social, political and economic;

- Actively raising widespread gender awareness and education at all levels so that women and men both are better aware of women's rights in numerous spheres;
- Implementing policies according formal monetary value to unpaid work, most of which is performed by women;
- Prohibiting employment of underage girls as domestic workers, a rapidly growing problem in urban areas;
- Formulating specific measures to promote women's participation in management and decision-making bodies, despite the official encouragement of the promotion of women that already exists;
- Providing gender sensitisation and analysis training for policymakers and implementers;
- Formulating a national plan of action for women's development, based on national priorities and international Declarations and Conventions.

These are ambitious targets, to be sure, but the Royal Government is sincere in its determination to not be part of the pervasive, structural and systemic denial of rights that affects women and girls worldwide.

To achieve this, the Government acknowledges remaining areas of shortcomings for women and will engage in self-analysis of practises that could be harmful or detrimental to the development of a woman's full potential.

Its policy commitments, continuing to go beyond counting the number of women in various project activities, will increasingly look at holistic planning and implementation as indicators of gender equality.

It will become increasingly cognisant of the widely varying situations of women in the nation's different ethnic communities. In venerating the country's rich traditions, it will nonetheless continue to be bold and flexible in adapting to a modern context for women.

In so doing, Bhutan will build on its established bedrock of commitment to gender equality and will ensure that this vital commitment in the future is raised to the next level and beyond.

15. Annexure

Annex A - References

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Annex B - Tables

TABLE 1.1: POPULATION ESTIMATES BY AGE AND SEX, 2000

Age group	Persons			Percent		
	Total	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female
0 - 4	104,743	52,488	52,255	15.5	7.7	7.7
5 - 9	98,192	48,757	49,435	14.5	7.2	7.3
10 - 14	82,141	41,600	40,541	12.1	6.1	6.0
15 - 19	60,956	30,919	30,037	9.0	4.6	4.4
20 - 24	53,824	26,741	27,083	7.9	3.9	4.0
25 - 29	46,201	23,111	23,090	6.8	3.4	3.4
30 - 34	41,460	20,920	20,540	6.1	3.1	3.0
35 - 39	37,979	19,621	18,358	5.6	2.9	2.7
40 - 44	32,008	16,503	15,505	4.7	2.4	2.3
45 - 49	25,736	13,352	12,383	3.8	2.0	1.8
50 - 54	24,413	12,566	11,847	3.6	1.9	1.7
55 - 59	21,600	11,163	10,438	3.2	1.6	1.5
60 - 64	19,836	10,238	9,599	2.9	1.5	1.4
65 - 69	11,964	5,889	6,075	1.8	0.9	0.9
70 - 74	8,136	4,075	4,061	1.2	0.6	0.6
75 +	8,744	4,382	4,362	1.3	0.6	0.6
All ages	677,934	342,324	335,610	100.0	50.5	49.5

Note: Estimates based on population rate 3.1% NHS,1994.

Source: CSO, Ministry of Planning

TABLE 1.2: SUMMARY OF POPULATION INDICATORS, 1995 TO 2000

Population Indicators	1991	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Sex Ratio (males per 100 females)	102.3	102.1	102.0	105.2	104.1	102.0	98.0	102.0	102.0	102.0
Age Composition (%)	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.1	100.1	100.0

0 - 14	38.9	38.7	38.6	39.2	39.2	42.1	42.1	42.1	42.1	42.1
15 - 49	47.7	47.9	48.0	44.2	47.3	44.0	44.0	44.0	44.0	44.0
50 - 59	6.6	6.7	6.8	6.5	6.6	6.8	6.7	6.8	6.8	6.8
60 +	6.8	6.7	6.6	7.0	6.9	7.1	7.2	7.2	7.2	7.2
Median age(years)	20.5	20.6	20.6	20.5	n.a	19.4	19.4	19.4	19.4	19.4
Dependency Ratio										
Child dependency	68.8	68.4	68.6	n.a	69.6	78.3	78.3	78.3	78.3	78.3
Old age dependency	7.7	7.6	7.5	n.a	7.8	7.9	8.0	8.0	8.0	7.9
Total dependency	76.4	76.0	76.1	91.7	77.4	86.2	86.3	86.3	86.3	86.2
Index of aging	11.1	11.0	11.0	n.a	11.3	10.1	10.1	10.1	10.1	10.1

Source: Estimates by CSO, Planning Commission, Thimphu

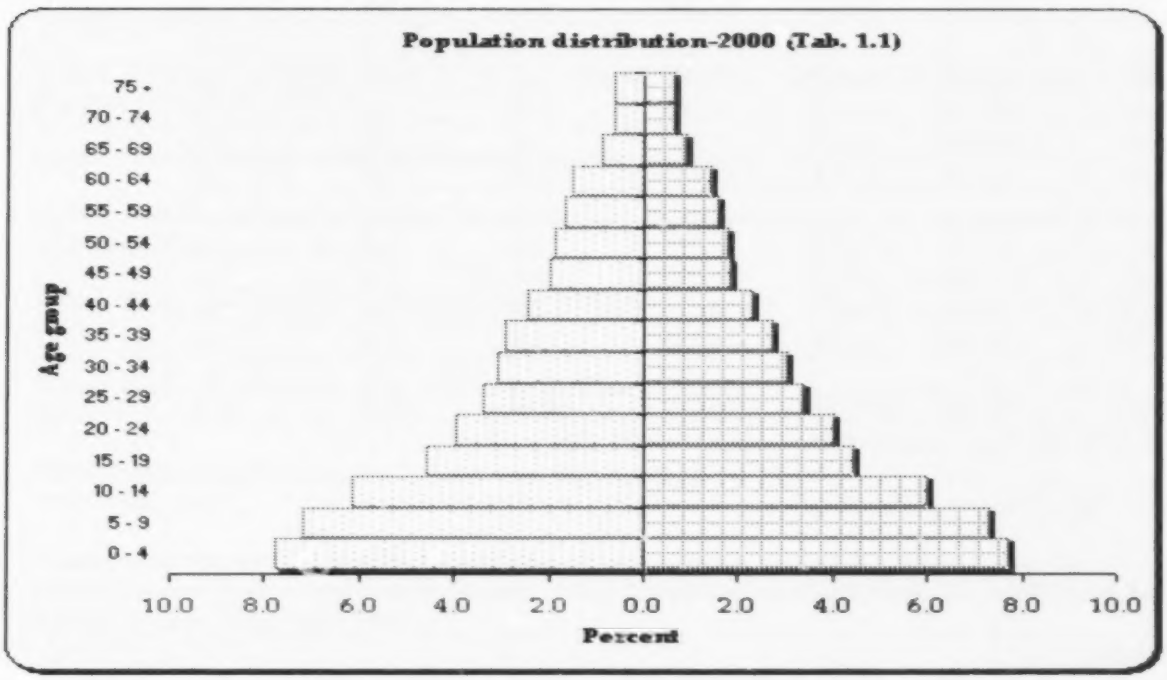

TABLE 1.3: OUTLAYS OF DEVELOPMENT PLANS, PERCENTAGE BY CATEGORY, FIRST PLAN TO EIGHTTH PLAN

(percent)

Sector	First Plan	Second Plan	Third Plan	Fourth Plan	Fifth Plan(a)	Sixth Plan	Seventh Plan	Eighth Plan
His Majesty's Secretariat								0.1
National Assembly								0.1
Royal Advisory Council								0.1
Council for Ecclesiastical Affairs								1.0
Special Comsn. For Cult. Affairs								0.8
Judiciary								0.7
Royal Audit Authority								0.3
RCSC								5.1
BOC								0.2
DDC								0.1
NEC								0.3
Police, Jail & Fire Services								3.2
Agriculture	1.8	10.7	12.3	23.4	9.0	9.2	4.5	3.1
Animal Husbandry	1.4	2.9	5.1	5.6	3.5	3.5	2.1	1.8
Area Development								4.1
Forestry	3.0	3.4	6.0	10.0	4.9	4.4	3.1	2.9
Secretariat	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1.0
Registration	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.1
Land Record & Survey	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	0.4
Secretariat								0.1
Power	1.4	4.5	6.3	4.6	7.3	13.1	2.5	11.3
Trade and Industries	1.0	0.5	5.3	15.8	7.0	13.3	5.4	0.6
Geological Survey	-	-	-	-	-	0.4	1.0	0.3
Tourism	-	-	3.0	1.1	0.6	-	-	0.1
Secretariat								0.2
Road Services	58.7	34.9	17.8	11.6	16.9	9.3	7.8	13.1
Surface Transport								0.2
Civil Aviation	7.0	5.9	2.0	-	0.6	0.5	0.6	0.2
Post Services	0.5	2.9	2.4	1.5	1.4	0.7	1.1	0.4
Telecommunications	-	-	3.1	3.4	0.7	1.4	7.0	4.1
Work & Housing Services								3.1
Thimphu City Corporation								0.5

Secretariat								0.2
Education	8.8	17.7	18.9	12.2	11.2	8.1	11.1	9.9
Health	2.9	8.3	8.0	4.9	5.1	4.2	6.6	8.5
Secretariat								2.9
Debt Services								7.2
Common Public Services								2.1
Reserve for pay Revision								7.5
Foreign Affairs								2.5
Royal Instt. of Management								0.5
Planning Commission								0.3
General Government	-	-	--		24.0	20.6	39.7	
Dzongkhags	-	-	-	-	-	2.5	23.0	2.3
Other	13.4	7.7	8.9	4.9	-	-	-	
Total outlay	100.0	100.0	100.0	99.0	100.0	91.2	100.0	103.1

(a) See footnotes to Table 13.1.

Source: Planning Commission, Thimphu

TABLE 4.1 : CRIME REPORTS BY NATURE OF CRIME, BHUTAN, 1995 TO 2000.

(numbers)

Nature of crime	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Crime against human body	542	552	498	390	453	606
Sexual offence	52	33	42	45	48	73
Crime against property	785	747	675	609	635	728
Motor vehicle accident	334	333	319	233	240	266
Forest offence	7	8	7	3	8	4
Antiques	90	193	176	144	125	98
Fire incidents	59	48	47	28	34	29
Others	154	132	127	81	49	62
All crimes	**2,023**	**2,046**	**1,891**	**1,533**	**1,592**	**1,866**

Source : Crime & Operations, Royal Bhutan Police (HQ), Thimphu.

TABLE 7.1: NUMBER OF STUDENTS BY GRADE AND TYPE OF SCHOOL, BHUTAN, 2000

Grade	Private school			Community school			Primary school			Junior school			High school			All schools		
	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total	Boys	Girls	Total
Nursery	184	174	358	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	184	174	358
Pre primary	336	300	636	2,388	1,997	4,385	2,927	2,523	5,450	2,398	2,083	4,481	247	261	508	8,296	7,164	15,460
I	161	133	294	1,767	1,510	3,277	2,910	2,475	5,385	2,512	2,249	4,761	290	251	541	7,640	6,618	14,258
II	94	96	190	1,777	1,362	3,139	2,757	2,262	5,019	2,304	2,180	4,484	241	251	492	7,173	6,151	13,324
III	73	53	126	1,371	1,029	2,400	2,607	2,173	4,780	2,334	2,112	4,446	253	235	488	6,638	5,602	12,240
IV	53	57	110	1,099	851	1,950	2,586	2,031	4,617	2,183	2,036	4,219	246	247	493	6,167	5,222	11,389
V	30	22	52	707	593	1,300	2,251	1,769	4,020	2,078	1,852	3,930	186	224	410	5,252	4,460	9,712
VI	34	18	52	502	382	884	1,918	1,555	3,473	1,996	1,844	3,840	230	235	465	4,680	4,034	8,714
VII	12	6	18	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,352	2,922	6,274	913	794	1,707	4,277	3,722	7,999
VIII	8	4	12	-	-	-	-	-	-	2,211	1,862	4,073	1,313	1,032	2,345	3,532	2,898	6,430
IX	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	3,079	2,427	5,506	3,079	2,427	5,506
X	14	31	45	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,976	1,345	3,321	1,990	1,376	3,366
XI	191	174	365	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	617	244	861	808	418	1,226
XII	110	81	191	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	463	178	641	573	259	832
Non formal	0	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	1,323	4,049	5,372
Total	1,300	1,149	2,449	9,611	7,724	17,335	17,956	14,788	32,744	21,368	19,140	40,508	10,054	7,724	17,778	61,612	50,525	116,186

Source: Education Division, Thimphu

TABLE 8.1: HEALTH PERSONNEL BY CATEGORY, 1996 TO 2000

Health personnel	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Doctors	103	101	98	103	109
Health Assistants	99	111	115	151	148
Basic health workers	158	154	152	182	178
Sister and nurses	352	355	386	467	443
Other technicians *	185	183	211	253	244
Indigenous physicians	21	19	28	31	31
Indigenous compounders	16	17	17	17	17
Village health workers (VHW)	1275	1093	1245	1012	1,327

Note: * Including compounders

Source: Health Division, Thimphu

Table 8.2 HOSPITAL ACTIVITIES REPORT FOR Bhutan - 2000

Sl. No.	Type of activity	Number
1	Sanctioned Beds	1023
2	Available Beds	977
3	Admission	30492
6	Patient days	197246
5	Bed Occupancy	55.3
6	Average length of stay	6.5
	Out patients	
1	New National	524116
2	Old National	188186
	Total	**712302**
	X-Ray	
1	Chest	13565
2	B/meal	279
3	Others	14121
	Total	**27965**
	Laboratory	
1	Blood	68659
2	Stool	4198
3	Urine	36886
4	Skin	282
5	Sputum	6123
6	MP	21595
7	Others	13131
	Total	**150874**
	Dental	
1	Prophylaxis	1600

2	Filling	11194
3	Extractions	15715
4	Others	22163
	Total	**50672**
	Surgical	
1	Major	539
2	Minor	3687
3	Others	3351
	Total	**7577**
	Gynaecological	
1	Major	545
2	Minor	947
3	Others	185
	Total	**1677**
	Obstretric	
1	Total number of births	3541
2	Normal deliveries	2924
3	Prolonged labour	83
4	Breech	75
5	Twins (sets)	41
6	Still birth	55
7	Premature	99
8	Caesarean section	348
9	Forceps delivery	56
10	Vacuum delivery	39
11	Antepartum Haemorrhage	47
12	Post-partum Haemorrhage	59
13	Inversion of uterus	2
14	Retained Placenta	132
15	Pre-eclampsia	114
16	Eclampsia	8
17	Ruptured uterus	8
18	Sepsis	24
19	Severe Anaemia	89

20	Abortion	267
	Orthopaedic	
1	Major	160
2	Minor	889
3	Others	246
	Total	**1295**
	ENT	
1	Major	227
2	Minor	413
3	Others	110
	Total	**750**
	Eye	
1	Major	320
2	Minor	1088
3	Others	4176
	Total	**5584**
	Ultra sound	
1	Pelvis	1436
2	Abdomen	6350
3	Foetus	2082
4	Enchocardigraphy	49
5	Endoscopy	1060
6	Other	185
	Total	**11162**
	Urology	
1	Major	8
2	Minor	35
3	Others	25
	Total	**68**

TABLE 8.3: DETAILS OF MATERNAL AND CHILD HEALTH CARE SERVICES, 1995 TO 2000

Type of care	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Maternal health care attendance(a)	101,407	65,568	54,053	19,860	66,158	66,625
Antenatal	11,614	40,269	44,692	10,516	45,611	44,166
Postnatal	89,793	25,299	9,361	9,344	20,548	22,460
Deliveries attended						
Home	1,379	1,327	1,348	1,140	873	941
Hospital/Basic Health Units	5,244	4,825	5,083	3,777	6,244	6,099
Total deliveries	6,623	6,152	6,431	4,917	7,117	7,040
Child health care attendance						
First visit	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Re-visit	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a	n.a
Total attendance	n.a	n.a	n.a	276,021	104,931	n.a
Malnourished children (b)						
All malnourished	4,751	4,525	n.a	4,001	n.a	3,021
Third degree	307	462	n.a	261	n.a	132

(a) Refers to total attendance, not a count of individuals.
(b) Children attending health units are classified according to three degrees of malnourishment,
Third degree malnourishment refers to the most severe cases.

Source: Health Division, Thimphu

TABLE 8.4: DETAILS OF MATERNAL HEALTH CARE ACTIVITIES BY DZONGKHAG, 1995 TO 2000

Dzongkhag	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Bjakar						
Antenatal	228	866	723	244	307	833
Postnatal	193	491	466	225	12	439
Reported deliveries	199	270	na	116	184	166
Trained deliveries	162	255	135	51	136	161
Chhukha						
Antenatal	993	4,356	6,451	1,617	1,976	8,178
Postnatal	904	3,086	1,561	1,496	61	3,608
Reported deliveries	395	350	na	690	755	813
Trained deliveries	390	331	720	643	688	733
Dagana						
Antenatal	247	588	560	281	258	463
Postnatal	322	605	415	315	44	453
Reported deliveries	211	184	na	118	92	122
Trained deliveries	98	122	174	61	78	114
Gasa						
Antenatal	43	75	55	47	39	53
Postnatal	8	1	13	19	5	10
Reported deliveries	7	6	na	15	19	13
Trained deliveries	3	6	3	11	22	13
Haa						
Antenatal	125	355	410	184	126	334
Postnatal	47	263	199	165	29	172
Reported deliveries	29	97	na	152	93	29
Trained deliveries	29	96	13	119	83	26
Lhuntse						
Antenatal	355	763	677	382	422	775
Postnatal	287	983	276	421	200	924
Reported deliveries	405	375	na	165	330	257
Trained deliveries	333	375	218	147	279	250
Mongar						
Antenatal	870	2,159	2,087	975	1,311	2,609

Postnatal	847	2,445	858	2,142	136	3,887
Reported deliveries	973	1,094		365	1,173	1,193
Trained deliveries	664	843	749	278	1,111	928
Dzongkhag	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Paro						
Antenatal	237	1,260	1,722	486	674	973
Postnatal	223	109	274	113	175	771
Reported deliveries	194	33	na	328	740	364
Trained deliveries	184	16	310	212	541	216
Pemagatshel						
Antenatal	327	904	930	209	270	1,235
Postnatal	393	2,943	299	302	81	689
Reported deliveries	147	535	na	77	223	329
Trained deliveries	84	324	275	36	228	299
Punakha						
Antenatal	294	1,279	1,529	426	444	1,542
Postnatal	44	166	126	226	7	802
Reported deliveries	92	154	na	322	144	283
Trained deliveries	63	129	154	288	137	275
Samdrupjongkhar						
Antenatal	903	2,106	2,124	765	824	2,878
Postnatal	730	3,375	918	626	64	1,696
Reported deliveries	500	723	na	383	458	706
Trained deliveries	332	507	659	249	450	675
Samtse						
Antenatal	803	2,612	2,544	914	940	2,571
Postnatal	622	923	639	634	26	1,378
Reported deliveries	50	132	na	494	168	190
Trained deliveries	50	132	67	404	96	189
Sarpang						
Antenatal	660	3,379	3,233	827	833	3,161
Postnatal	363	709	536	561	15	941
Reported deliveries	86	133	na	155	256	303
Trained deliveries	86	94	99	121	237	256
Thimphu						
Antenatal	2,508	12,066	14,869	234	2,107	10,630
Postnatal	710	1,403	399	162	12	816
Reported deliveries	853	167	na	126	1,535	189

Trained deliveries	818	148	135	91	1,523	183
Dzongkhag	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Trashigang						
Antenatal	1,053	2,837	1,825	1,026	801	2,562
Postnatal	1,138	2,628	747	705	105	1,471
Reported deliveries	1,266	895	na	642	780	793
Trained deliveries	883	649	393	506	706	762
Trashiyangtse						
Antenatal	227	627	504	260	227	622
Postnatal	228	789	144	108	14	449
Reported deliveries	290	185	na	69	171	113
Trained deliveries	282	162	34	57	131	93
Trongsa						
Antenatal	296	701	760	88	321	818
Postnatal	245	917	212	65	48	594
Reported deliveries	245	243	na	117	255	464
Trained deliveries	192	196	227	56	212	276
Tsirang						
Antenatal	372	756	759	315	332	1,202
Postnatal	438	767	332	368	7	534
Reported deliveries	122	42	na	69	111	81
Trained deliveries	122	42	107	69	98	81
Wangduephodrang						
Antenatal	607	1,650	1,640	706	563	2,075
Postnatal	635	1,214	572	578	90	1,597
Reported deliveries	264	284	na	347	464	454
Trained deliveries	214	222	251	251	358	393
Zhemgang						
Antenatal	406	930	1,230	530	450	652
Postnatal	416	1,482	375	113	26	1,226
Reported deliveries	295	250	na	167	318	178
Trained deliveries	254	176	360	127	298	176

Note: Trained delivery refer to deliveries attended by trained health Personnel in hospitals/BHUs and at home

Source: Health Division, Thimphu

Table 8.5 Morbidity cases reported from BHUs - Bhutan, 2000

Sl. No	Diseases	0 - 11/12		1 - 4		5 - 14		15 +		Total	%
		M	F	M	F	M	F	M	F		
1	Diarrhoea/dysentery	2307	2455	6887	6756	9912	9559	16389	12820	67085	11.78
2	Cough and cold	3111	3356	7600	8359	16582	18739	39659	37318	134724	23.66
3	Pneumonia	816	891	1584	1519	1234	1229	2052	2134	11459	2.01
4	Helminthic infestation	44	51	2236	2384	4367	4139	5527	5810	24558	4.31
5	Skin infection	986	1153	3651	3780	7277	6763	16605	12075	52290	9.18
6	Malaria	28	19	156	124	558	449	1473	955	3762	0.66
7	Fever of unknown origin	359	401	1148	1056	1881	1986	5622	5016	17469	3.07
8	Conjunctivitis	568	728	1437	1690	2749	2868	8047	9346	27433	4.82
9	Otitis media	479	489	1235	1249	2008	1964	2027	1871	11322	1.99
10	Nutritional deficiency	120	153	513	691	978	1251	4240	6339	14285	2.51
11	Peptic ulcer syndrome	6	8	206	272	1609	2137	14270	15627	34135	5.99
12	Diseases of teeth and gum	12	15	234	287	1633	1676	5539	5653	15049	2.64
13	Urinary tract infection/nephritis	17	20	161	171	407	466	2478	3888	7608	1.34
14	Injuries	66	61	751	725	3345	2046	11132	4334	22460	3.94
15	STD					11	20	532	262	825	0.14
16	Childhood diseases	30	34	215	245	782	715	314	241	2576	0.45
17	Diseases of female genital tract		3		35		115		1854	2007	0.35
18	Headache	42	42	446	726	5447	6264	21378	23777	58122	10.21
19	Others	538	536	1901	1926	4435	5219	23396	24369	62320	10.94
	Total	**9529**	**10415**	**30361**	**31995**	**65215**	**67605**	**180680**	**173689**	**569489**	**100**
	Percentage	**1.67**	**1.83**	**5.33**	**5.62**	**11.45**	**11.87**	**31.73**	**30.50**	**100**	

TABLE 8.6: DETAILS OF CHILD GROWTH MONITORING IN IMMUNIZATION CLINICS, BHUTAN, 1995 TO 2000

Details	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Children weighed(nos.)	14,800	16,467	16,473	16,528	12,276	87,390
Child malnutrition(nos.)	4,751	4,525	4,201	4,001	2,006	3,021
Degree I	3,176	3,139	2,965	2,940	616	2,336
Degree II	1,268	924	890	800	177	553
Degree III	307	462	346	261	23	132
Child malnutrition(%)	32	28	26	24	na	4

Source: Health Division, Thimphu

TABLE 8.7: WATER AND SANITATION FACILITIES BY TYPE AND BY DZONGKHAG, 2000

(numbers)

Dzongkhag	Houses	Latrines	Houses with piped water	Animal sheds	Garbage pits	Kitchen Gardens
Bjakar	1,635	1,364	1,205	995	1,232	1174
Chhukha	8,490	7,253	6,456	2,177	2,524	3399
Dagana	2,794	2,542	2,095	2,374	2,291	2235
Gasa	417	350	107	340	270	401
Haa	970	911	902	380	402	952
Lhuntse	2,387	2,197	1,955	1,552	1,228	2152
Mongar	5,410	4,659	3,363	3,686	2,500	3010
Paro	3,931	3,098	2,493	1,168	2,038	2083
Pemagatshel	2,175	1,815	1,753	1,282	449	1778
Punakha	2,343	2,151	1,722	1,463	1,611	1673
Samdrupjongkha	6,343	5,587	3,715	3,556	2,615	3988
Samtse	7,798	6,447	4,283	5,100	3,661	4795
Sarpang	4,737	4,216	2,646	3,457	2,993	3250
Shemgang	2,515	2,304	1,717	1,183	1,642	1406
Thimphu	1,917	1,744	1,230	1,085	1,139	1709
Trashigang	8,264	6,802	4,329	4,407	3,564	5630
Trashiyangtse	3,267	2,873	2,118	2,498	1,054	2604
Trongsa	1,899	1,724	1,591	1,422	1,079	1574
Tsirang	2,265	11,870	1,298	2,059	997	1633
Wangduephodrang	3,602	3,393	2,628	1,862	3,112	2313
Bhutan	73,159	63,300	47,606	42,046	36,401	47759

Source: Health Division, Thimphu

TABLE 8.8: FAMILY PLANNING ACCEPTORS BY TYPE OF METHOD, BHUTAN 1995 TO 2001

(persons)

Method	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Vasectomy	1,263	1,930	74	4,451	6,835	8,204
Minilap	na	na	806	478	1,374	1,510
Intra uterine device(IUD)	759	1,602	1,582	1,977	2,549	1,582
Pills	8,794	8,917	6,483	7,104	3,697	4,227
Condoms	5,635	7,411	6,309	7,599	11,310	3,393
Injection DMPA	9,278	12,065	12,024	15,746	15,184	8,498
All methods	25,729	31,925	27,278	37,355	40,949	27414

Source: Health Division, Thimphu

TABLE 8.9 : DETAILS OF CRIME AGAINST HUMAN BODY, BHUTAN, 1995 TO 2000.

(numbers)

Details	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Murder	16	12	7	11	13	18
Attempted murder	10	15	6	5	3	2
Dacoity with murder	1	-	-	-	-	-
Rape cum murder	-	-	-	-	1	-
Robbery with murder	-	-	-	-	2	1
Infanticide	-	-	-	-	-	-
Unnatural death	24	19	22	20	19	30
Accidental death	42	40	41	30	38	42
Drowning	29	14	31	22	16	27
Suicide	26	35	34	26	32	41
Attempted suicide	7	6	3	11	6	14
Assault	367	387	319	241	286	367
Abduction	2	3		1	-	1
Kidnapping	1	2		1	1	1
Poisoning	1	2	3		3	1
Drugs(Narcotics)	-	-	11	9	20	25
Obstruction of lawful authority	1	2	5	3	3	3
Wrongful confinement	-	1	-	1	-	-
Affray	3	3	4	1	1	-
Accidental injury	1	3	2	1	2	6
Black magic	1	1	1	2	-	1
Defamation	1	3	2	2	4	5
Grievous hurt	2	1	2	3	3	3
Missing of Person	-	-	-	-	-	18
All crimes against human body	**535**	**549**	**493**	**390**	**453**	**606**

Source : Crime & Operations, Royal Bhutan Police (HQ), Bhutan.

TABLE 9.1: PERCENTAGE OF POPULATION ACCORDING TO ECONOMIC ACTIVITY BY AGE AND SEX, 1984

Age group	Agriculture	Government service	Business	Others	No occupation
Male					
Less than 15	7.0	-	-	1.0	92.0
15 - 19	54.7	2.0	*	3.5	39.7
20 - 24	70.9	11.1	1.5	4.0	12.5
25 - 29	76.7	13.8	2.0	4.4	3.1
30 - 34	82.0	11.1	1.7	4.3	0.8
35 - 39	84.4	7.7	2.4	4.7	*
40 - 44	87.7	5.9	2.3	3.6	*
45 - 54	90.5	3.3	1.6	3.6	1.0
55 - 64	88.1	1.0	0.9	4.0	6.0
65 and over	71.1	1.5	*	0.9	26.0
All ages	52.5	3.9	0.9	2.8	39.9
Age 15 - 64	78.4	6.5	1.4	4.0	9.6
Female					
Less than 15	9.2	-	-	0.2	90.7
15 - 19	87.8	*	*	0.4	11.0
20 - 24	95.7	1.0	1.1	*	2.1
25 - 29	98.0	*	*	*	0.7
30 - 34	98.4	*	*	*	*
35 - 39	99.1	*	*	*	*
40 - 44	99.2	*	*	*	-
45 - 54	98.4	*	*	*	1.2
55 - 64	91.1	*	*	*	8.5
65 and over	73.2	*	*	-	26.1
All ages	61.5	0.3	0.3	0.2	37.8
Age 15-64	95.4	0.4	0.5	0.2	3.6

Total persons					
Less than 15	8.2	-	-	0.6	91.3
15 - 19	72.4	1.2	*	1.9	24.4
20 - 24	83.9	5.8	1.3	2.0	7.0
25 - 29	88.0	6.8	1.1	2.2	1.8
30 - 34	90.8	5.4	1.1	2.1	0.6
35 - 39	91.7	3.9	1.4	2.5	0.5
40 - 44	93.5	3.0	1.4	1.9	*
45 - 54	94.4	1.7	1.0	1.9	1.1
55 - 64	89.6	0.6	0.6	2.0	7.2
65 and over	72.1	1.0	*	0.5	26.0
All ages	57.2	2.0	0.6	1.4	38.8
Age 15-64	87.2	3.4	0.9	2.0	6.5

Source: Demographic Sample Survey, CSO, 1984

TABLE 12.1 : DETAILS OF CRIME AGAINST PROPERTY, BHUTAN, 1995 TO 2000.

(numbers)

Details	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Theft	383	356	325	288	298	390
Burglary	126	156	94	142	176	132
House breaking	4	3	4	3	6	12
Robbery	28	27	14	18	14	10
Dacoity	58	25	32	12	12	18
Pick pocketing	6	8	12	9	6	1
Cheating	18	19	38	22	16	31
Loss of property	36	31	38	23	12	14
Forgery	3	5	3	6	8	9
Criminal breach of trust	14	9	7	7	5	9
Embezzlement	5	5	2	2	-	6
Counterfeit of coin/notes	1	6	2	1	1	8
Misappropriation	6	6	1	2	-	4
Cattle lifting	29	24	25	23	22	23
Mischief	45	46	44	33	33	39
Extortion	7	3	4	1	1	1
Hijacking	4	2	2	-	-	4
Bribery	-	-	-	-	2	1
Impersonation	-	-	-	-	6	-
Money laundering	-	-	-	-	2	1
Food adulteration	-	-	-	-	-	-
Attemted to robbery	2	2	5	1	1	-
Illegal trespass	-	3	2	2	1	2
Attempted to theft	-	-	-	-	-	-
Snatching	-	-	-	1	-	-
House trespass	2	2	-	2	-	4
Trafficking in fair sex	-	-	-	-	-	-
Explosive	-	-	-	-	8	-
Attempted to dacoity	-	-	-	-	-	-
Criminal trespass	1	2	1	-	-	2
Smuggling	4	6	18	9	5	4
Conspiracy	1	-	1	1	-	-

Illegal collection of Donation	-	-	-	-	-	1
Sabotage	-	-	-	-	-	2
Weight and measurers	-	1	-	1	-	-
All crimes against property	**783**	**747**	**674**	**609**	**635**	**728**

Source : Crime & Operations, Royal Bhutan Police (HQ), Thimphu.

TABLE 12.2 : DETAILS OF SEXUAL OFFENCES, BHUTAN, 1995 TO 2000.

(numbers)

Details	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Rape	10	12	4	15	10	17
Attempted rape	9	3	10	3	7	15
Adultery	8	4	4	7	9	14
Incest	-	2	1	1	-	2
Molestation	2	-	3	1	3	1
Elopement	15	11	19	13	16	23
Eve teasing	2	-	-	1	-	-
Prostitution	6	1	1	2	3	-
Robbery cum rape	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dacoity cum rape	-	-	-	1	-	1
All sexual offences	**52**	**33**	**42**	**44**	**48**	**73**

Source : Crime & Operations, Royal Bhutan Police (HQ), Thimphu.

Annex C - Key Informants

- H.E. Lyonpo Jigmi Y. Thinley, Minister of Foreign Affairs
- H.E. Lyonpo Sonam Tobgye, Chief Justice, High Court
- Dasho Ugyen Tshering, Secretary of Foreign Affairs
- Dasho Dawa Dem, Secretary, National Women's Association of Bhutan
- Ms. Tshering Pem, Gender Focal Point, Planning Commission Secretariat
- Ms. Kunzang C. Namgyel, Mr. Yeshey Dorji and Ms. Doma Tshering Dorji, Ministry of Foreign Affairs
- Ms. Chimmy Pem, Gender Focal Point, Ministry of Health and Education
- Ms. Sonam Lhamo, Gender Focal Point, National Assembly Secretariat
- Ms. Kinley Yangzom, Gender Focal Point, Royal Civil Service Commission
- Ms. Kesang Choden, Gender Focal Point, Department of Aid and Debt Management, Ministry of Finance
- Ms. Pem Chuki Wangdi, Gender Focal Point, National Women's Association of Bhutan
- Mr. Chandra B. Chhetri, Gender Focal Point, Bhutan Chamber of Commerce and Industry
- Mr. Tashi Gyalpo, Gender Focal Point, Bhutan Broadcasting Service
- Ms. Tashi Chozam, Gender Focal Point, High Court
- Mr. Kinley Namgyel, High Court
- Ms. Yanday Penjor, Education Division, Ministry of Health and Education
- Ms. Seeta Giri, Mr. Tenzin Thinley and Ms. Minori Terada, United Nations Development Fund (UNDP), Thimphu
- Ms. Choeki Ongmo Dazer, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), Thimphu
- Ms. Janette Moritz, formerly United Nations Volunteers (UNV), Thimphu
- Ms. Susan D. Roe, formerly Save the Children/US, Thimphu